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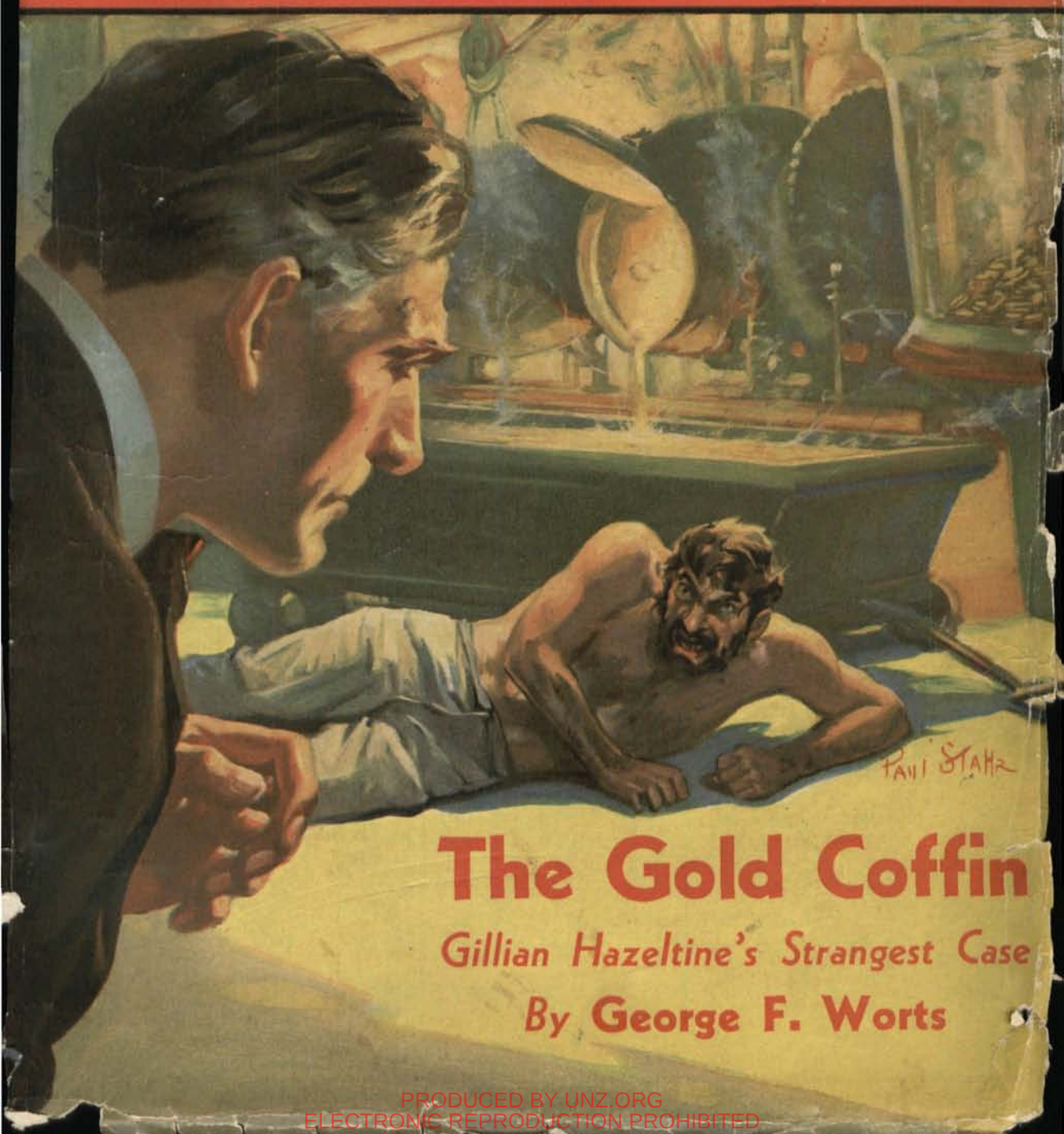

The Gold Coffin

Gillian Hazeltine's Strangest Case

By George F. Worts

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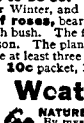

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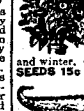

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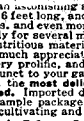

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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary
MESSAGERIES HACHETTE PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.,
3, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4 111 Rue Réaumur

Published weekly and copyright, 1934, by The Frank A. Munsey Company. Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $7.00 to Canada; $7.00 to other foreign countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered. Entered as second class matter November 28, 1896, at the post office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879. The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office. Copyrighted in Great Britain.

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The Gold Coffin

By GEORGE F. WORTS

Author of "Where There's a Will," "Isle of the Meteor," etc.

Strange things were going on in that old house—and Lawyer Gillian Hazeltine suspected that his lying client knew too much about them

It was an amazing performance for a lawyer's office

CHAPTER I.

"I'M THE MAN!"

"HE refuses to state his business," Miss Walsh said. "He's the weirdest looking old fellow you ever saw, Mr. Hazeltine. He has green glasses, and a white beard, braided at the end with matches stuck in it. He says his name's Pompernickle. But he doesn't look crazy. And there's something awfully curious about his voice."

Gillian Hazeltine looked inquiringly at his brisk and pretty private secretary as she hesitated. Her brows were puckered.

"What's curious about it?" he asked.

"I'd swear I've heard that man's voice before. But I can't place it. There's really something very baffling about him. He refuses to see any one of your assistants. He says it's horribly important — that it concerns a man's soul, a man's future, and a man's life."

"He sounds like a nut," Gillian Hazeltine said. "But send him in."

Miss Walsh was a barrier between

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the busy lawyer and the many cranks who stormed his office. It was her custom to admit no one to the sacred precincts of Mr. Hazeltine's private office unless she was sure the caller deserved the privilege.

When the lawyer's door opened again, a half-minute later, Gillian Hazeltine readily understood his secretary's doubt. The man who came in was one of the strangest figures Gillian had ever seen; a regular Rip Van Winkle. Shaggy white hair protruded in tangled wisps from beneath the brim of his ancient black felt hat. His black suit fitted him like a bag. He wore Congress gaiters, and black cotton gloves. Gillian hadn't seen a pair of Congress gaiters in upwards of twenty years.

And it was only years ago that beggars had worn green glasses like these. The lenses were square, the frame was of silver or steel. His beard, like his hair, was white and shaggy; it reached almost to his waist. The end of it was braided, and in this braided part the old fellow had inserted not only matches but toothpicks and pins.

The old man closed the door. He must have been, in earlier life, a tall man—at least six feet tall. The corruption of the years had bent his back and pushed his once wide shoulders forward.

The old man's disappearance was too much for the secretary

He shuffled away from the door, as he entered, peered at Gillian through the green lenses and said in a thin, quavering voice:

"I want to make sure, first of all, that you are Gillian Hazeltine.—Are you Gillian Hazeltine, the lawyer?"

Gillian gravely nodded.

"That's fine!" the old man said with that senile quaver. "Now, I want you to take a good look at me. They

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tell me you've got a wonderful memory. Have you ever seen me before?"

Gillian looked the old man over again from head to foot. He shook his head.

"I'm afraid you've got me," he said. "I don't place you."

The old fellow laughed. It was a senile cackle. His bent shoulders jiggled as he laughed, as old men's shoulders do.

"I'm here to make you a proposition," the ancient stranger said. "I'm here to ask you to save a man's soul—his future—his very life!"

He stopped dramatically. The black-gloved hands tremulously grasped the edge of the desk.

"I'm that man!" he cried shrilly.

GILLIAN hastily reached into his humidor for a cigar. The old man's intensity made him uncomfortable. Gillian gripped the cigar between his teeth, but he did not light it. Over the top of it he stared a little uneasily at his queer caller.

The old man made his mouth writhe. Under the white beard, his face was distorted with the grimaces of agitated old age.

"Ask me who I am!" he shrilled.

Gillian was beginning to wonder if he had been wise, after all, in letting Miss Walsh send the old duffer in.

"Very well," he said. "Who are you?"

The old man bent closer, peering at him. "You haven't guessed!" he cried.

"No. I haven't guessed. I'm afraid you baffle me completely."

Swiftly, the old man pushed himself away from the desk. With one sweeping gesture of his left hand—the most amazing gesture Gillian Hazeltine had ever beheld—his caller snatched off the beard, the glasses, the hat and the thatched white hair. In the same split second, he straightened up; and by those lightning gestures he became a tall young man of twenty-five!

Gillian found himself staring bewilderedly at one of the most famously handsome young men on earth—at a face quite as familiar to the civilized world as, say, the wrapper on Ivory soap, or the hood of a Ford automobile.

"Dale Torrent!" Gillian gasped, and in his astonishment he rose with such haste from the chair that it went over backward.

CHAPTER II.

HOLLYWOOD GENTLEMAN.

AT the sound of the crash, the door flew open and Miss Walsh peered in.

She stared at the transformed old man and faintly screamed, "Dale Torrent!"

The youthful celebrity gave her a quick, amused grin. "In the flesh," he confirmed amiably. "Not a motion picture!"

If President Roosevelt, disguised, had walked into his office, Gillian could have been no more flabbergasted. For Dale Torrent was the cinematic man of the hour—the "It Man" of the season—the gifted young actor—the current Boy Friend of Hollywood—over whom all the woman stars were quarreling. He shared, with one or two other film actors, the distinction of having popularized a new type of screen hero; the man who treats 'em rough—who loves them, slaps them, and leaves them with a jeer.

Gillian, an ardent movie fan, had been amused, puzzled and even baffled

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by the popularity of Dale Torrent and his kind. Gillian modestly professed to know nothing about the workings of the feminine mind. Actually, however, he thought he knew it very well indeed. And upon several occasions he had been baffled by the cooings and the little shrieks of feminine appreciation and approval in picture houses when on the screen Dale Torrent roughly slapped a lovely young thing's cheek, or punched her in the jaw, or pushed her face into half a watermelon. He had always believed that girls did not care for that type of man; but he had been forced to conclude that many girls like their men rough, and that fundamentally they adore the cave man type. Certainly, the Dale Torrents of Hollywood proved something or other.

Yes, looking at Miss Walsh's face, he was sure that the Dale Torrents of Hollywood proved something. Her eyes were like stars seen through a faint mist. Her smile was that of a dazzled girl. She seemed on the point of twittering. Knowing her for the crisp and efficient young woman that she was during office hours, this glimpse of the other side of Miss Walsh was startling. He had never suspected that she was the kind of girl to whom a slap—or half a watermelon—in the face would be romantic. Evidently, however, Miss Walsh was just another girl who would worship a man who punched her in the jaw — and jeered. It proved again how little he knew about women.

Behind Miss Walsh were now gathered, in eager battalion, practically all of Gillian's feminine employées; all jammed in the little hallway, all gazing with shining eyes and enraptured smiles at the woman-handling expert, the face-slapping sheik, the lad who knocked them down and jeered! Never had he seen his office force so completely demoralized.

He said, "Miss Walsh, perhaps you'd better finish typing that brief in the O'Connor case."

Miss Walsh came out of Never-Never Land with a snap. She blushed. She gave her head a little shake. She was herself again.

"Yes, Mr. Hazeltine," she said crisply, and closed the door.

GILLIAN looked at Dale Torrent. He was still more than a little dazzled himself, at seeing this popular young man at close range and in the flesh; at hearing his familiar rich, vibrant voice.

Dale Torrent was elegant, even in that shapeless black suit.

"Sit down, Mr. Torrent," Gillian said cordially.

He wondered what this youthful celebrity was doing here in Greenfield, thousands of miles from his native Hollywood. He was, in fact, consumed with curiosity.

Mr. Torrent seated himself in the chair beside the desk.

"I really owe you an apology," he said, in that fine, virile, vibrant voice over which feminine audiences had so often cooed. "You must think I'm a lunatic, to come barging in here in this get-up."

Still more than a little bewildered by it all, Gillian reached for a match and lit his cigar.

"Not at all," he said politely.

"Was I convincing?" the young man asked.

"Amazingly so," Gillian uttered into a cloud of fragrant smoke. "Absolutely."

"I wear some kind of disguise most of the time," the young man confessed.

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"If I didn't, I'd be mobbed. Only last week, I came out of my tailor's, in Beverley Hills, wearing a brand new two-hundred-dollar suit. Before I could reach my roadster, parked at the curb, a mob of women jumped me. They tore my coat to shreds. Some of them even carried scissors. Souvenir hunters! Can you beat it?"

Gillian couldn't beat it. In the presence of such sheer, unadulterated popularity, he was dazed.

"Of course," Dale Torrent went on, "I don't have to go around in a crazy get-up like this one. I did this for a purpose. My self-respect demanded it. I am, after all, an actor. My father and grandfather were actors. And of course you've heard of my grandmother—Grace Wimberley?"

Gillian had, of course, heard of that famous beauty of another day—a vision of divine loveliness at the feet of whom kings were said to have thrown their crowns, wealthy Americans their hearts and their fortunes.

"I wanted to make sure, in spite of what they said, that I was still an actor. And of course it was absolutely necessary for me to disappear instantly from Hollywood.— What other course was left to me?"

Gillian, behind a smoke screen, sagely nodded. Just why Dale Torrent had had to disappear instantly from Hollywood would, he hoped, be made clear in due time.

"I had to startle them!" the young man cried. "I had to make them wonder and worry." He bent earnestly forward. "So I dug up this old outfit at the make-up department, and I took the first train east! I had made up my mind to bring my problems to you."

"Why?" Gillian said dryly.

"Isn't it obvious? Aren't you the most celebrated criminal lawyer in the country? Aren't you noted for your masterly showmanship? Haven't you the reputation of resorting to almost any sort of trickery to get a man a square deal?"

GILLIAN squirmed a little in his chair. His reputation, as this young man presented it, sounded very much like Frankenstein's monster. But he was amused and interested.

"Perhaps you'd better let me have the details," he said. "Have you killed somebody?"

Dale Torrent's large, handsome hazel eyes stared at him incredulously.

"Certainly you've heard," he cried, "about the scrap I've had with my producers—with Sam Fishbein and Ike Nussbaum!"

Gillian had heard nothing of it, but his eyes remained shrewd and alert.

"You'd better tell me everything," he said.

Dale Torrent's classic face had turned mahogany. His eyes blazed. He banged on the desk.

"For eight months," he said hotly, "I've been the big drawing card at Superart. The fan mail proved it; the box office reports proved it. For eight months, they've worked me like a slave, day and night — working me sometimes in three pictures at once.— Please don't misunderstand me. I didn't mind the work. I was making good. I was getting my chance. I saw my pictures pulling Superart out of the red. Fishbein and Nussbaum were on the verge of bankruptcy when my pictures suddenly began to click. In these past eight months, my pictures have pulled them not only out of the red, but have put them into one of the strongest financial positions in the business.—I'm not boasting. Mr.

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Hazeltine. I'm giving you facts, and I can also give you figures. For instance, my fan mail is now running close to ten thousand letters a day. That beats Garbo!"

"I see," Gillian murmured. "But you finally got mad—"

"You bet your life I finally got mad! Do you know how much those two bloodsuckers have been paying me?"

"It seems to me," Gillian said, "I read that you were getting six thousand a week."

Dale Torrent stared at him a moment, then uttered a harsh bark of laughter.

"Yes," he said, "that was the story the Superart press department sent out. Six thousand a week.— Actually, Mr. Hazeltine, I have been getting four hundred dollars a week!"

He stopped and gazed at Gillian expectantly.

"That's what I went to the mat about. Four hundred a week—when I'm every bit as big box office as Gable or Crawford!—When my fan mail runs bigger than Garbo's! And when they're not working me seven days a week, often from eight A.M. until midnight, they're renting me out to other studios for six thousand a week! And out of that six thousand I get only four hundred! That's why I quit! That's why I'm here!"

Gillian said, "Was it your idea that I bring suit against Superart?"

"Not at all!" the young man exclaimed. "I haven't told you everything. Did you see me in 'Trial by Jury'?"

"Yes."

Dale Torrent bent forward again. His eyes were gleaming; his lips parted.

"Let's have it on the chin. How was I?"

"Excellent. Of course, there were certain inaccuracies, from a lawyer's point of view, in the courtroom scene. But they weren't your fault."

"No. I had nothing to do with the script. My point is, did I make a convincing lawyer, or didn't I?"

"I thought you were excellent. Your address to the jury was—"

"—was as good a job, almost, as you could have done yourself?" Dale Torrent finished for him.

"FOUR days ago I walked into Sam Fishbein's office. I gave him his choice. Either pay me what I was earning—or tear up our contract! He refused to do either. He called me a conceited puppy. He said he had made me what I am to-day. He said Superart had a right to cash in on its gamble. He positively refused to raise the ante. He positively refused to tear up our contract. In short, I could keep on working for him at four hundred a week—or quit the pictures!—Because of that contract, I couldn't go to another company. If I were free, one of the other big outfits would sign me up to-morrow, for eight thousand a week! Sam Fishbein knew he had me. He knew I'd have to finish out my contract—eleven months—at four hundred. So I quit.—I punched him in the nose; and I quit!"

Panting, blazing eyed, Dale Torrent glared at Gillian.

"I told him I was going to go back into law! You know, I did once study law, and I was admitted to the bar."

"But do you want to become a lawyer?"

"No. Of course not. I'm an actor. I've been an actor since I was six. I'll never be anything but an actor. I happened to say that because, when 'Trial by Jury' was released the Bar Associa-

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tion of your state sent me an honorary membership. So that actually I know law, and am entitled to practice it, even though I never have done so."

"What did Fishbein say?"

"Well, his nose was bleeding. He was having a spasm. He was going to call the police. He told me to go to hell. He said, 'Go and become a lawyer—and become the bum you were when I fished you out of the gutter!' I was on the stage, as it happens, drawing down two hundred a week. I could go back to the stage, of course, but that would be bad policy. By playing my cards carefully—if you will help me—I can get back into the pictures at the salary I'm entitled to. I came to you because you're the smartest lawyer in America."

Somewhat carried away by the young man's impetuosity and his vehemence, Gillian murmured:

"You mean, you came here directly from Hollywood — deliberately to see me?"

"Yes, sir!"

"But what can I do for you?"

"Help me carry out that threat! Give out a story to the newspapers that you've taken me on as your junior partner! Tell the newspapers you're convinced that I'll make a wonderful lawyer!—That's the first step."

"And what," Gillian quietly asked, "is the next step?"

"Let me in on some big sensational case. Then let me get some of the credit for it.—I'm not a dumbbell. I don't know law, but I'm not afraid of any judge or jury on earth! I'll promise faithfully to follow orders. I won't spoil your case. I won't gum the works.

"All I want is some good publicity that will get back to Sam Fishbein and Ike Nussbaum—to call their bluff. If they see me make a spectacular success in the law, they'll have me back at my own terms.—Oh, I know it doesn't sound rational, but it's the Hollywood way of doing things. Let me have an office here, with my name on the door. The newspapers will give it a big play. It isn't as if you were a conservative corporation lawyer. It won't hurt you. You specialize in sensations.—What do you say?"

"I don't like it," Gillian answered. "It's phony."

HE got up and went to the window which overlooked the winding blue Sangamo. He knew that Dale Torrent's proposal was preposterous. It was Hollywood; and Hollywood wasn't Greenfield. Good publicity for Torrent might be bad publicity for Hazeltine. Gillian used publicity as a carpenter uses a saw, plane and hammer. His favorite maxim was that most cases are tried before they even go into the courtroom. Publicity was a useful tool, but when it was turned against you, it was often a steam roller. A criminal lawyer in the wrong limelight could be laughed out of existence.

Offsetting these objections was Gillian's liking for sensational cases. They were the spice of life. And he was intrigued by this amazing young man's problem.

Dale Torrent was now pacing up and down the office, giving the dramatic details of that fight with Sam Fishbein. He brandished his fists. His handsome eyes blazed. His nostrils quivered. He thumped himself on the chest.

Amused, excited, and not a little delighted by the show, Gillian watched and listened. Dale Torrent was dramatizing his bitterness with all the fer-

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vor he had ever displayed to a camera or a microphone. Sam Fishbein became a Roman emperor, Dale Torrent a Christian slave tossed to the lions.

"Ah, yes!" he said, with flashing eyes, as he banged his chest. "I walked the streets of Hollywood that night—trying—trying to think. Racking my brains for a solution."

His shoulders slumped; his head sagged. Bitter frustration was now expressed by every line of his body.

"I said to myself, this is the end. I went to my house in Beverley Hills. I went to my study. I opened my desk; took out my automatic pistol; loaded it!"

He paused. Gillian was breathing more rapidly now. He was being swept away. It was all good acting; it was wonderful acting. Gillian could fairly see that loaded pistol in the young man's hand.

"I pressed it to my temple. Then I asked myself—why? Why, why, why? What is the answer to this riddle?—Out of the black mists of that stark and horrible night, your name came floating, at that moment, and I put the pistol away.—I was saved!"

It was real. It was genuine. It was convincing. Gillian understood perfectly. He had often worked himself up to this same exalted pitch before juries; had swept away their prejudices on waves of emotional excitement. He wondered if Dale Torrent was as sincere when he punched a heroine in the nose or threw a bucket of water at her. Was he always playing a part; or was he, under the skin, the kind of man who really believed in punching women in the nose? Did he punch their noses on principle, or because he was paid to punch their noses, or because he liked to punch their noses, or because he believed that their noses deserved to be punched? Or had he merely discovered that a punch in the nose or the jaw was the master key to all women's hearts?

Arms folded on his chest, the famous young actor was staring intently at him.

"We understand each other," Dale Torrent said in his rich, deep voice. "We are cut from the same cloth. I *knew* you would understand!—Here! I forgot this—this sordid detail!"

He forked a folded slip of pink paper out of a pocket of the ill-fitting black vest. He strode toward Gillian, unfolding it. He held it out to Gillian.

WITH his hands in his pockets, his teeth sunk in his cigar, Gillian looked at the check but did not take it. It was a cashier's draft, on the Hollywood branch of the Bank of America, for $9,112.42, made payable to Gillian Hazeltine.

Gillian lifted his eyes to the flushed face of Hollywood's boy friend.

"All you've got?" Gillian asked.

"Except for living expenses for a few months. I sold my car, my equity in my Beverley Hills house, my jewelry, including the platinum wrist watch my mother gave me—everything of value I owned went into this check."

When Gillian failed to withdraw his hands from his pockets, the young man cried:

"Do you refuse it?"

"I've got to think this over," Gillian said.

"But what is there to think over? It's either this gesture—or oblivion. Hours count!—Sam Fishbein is as stubborn as a mule. But he's show folks. He'll get over being sore about his broken jawbone."

"I thought you punched his nose."

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"I also punched him in the jaw. If I put this over, he'll be tickled to death. And so will the whole industry."

Gillian understood, and he didn't. His mind was a playground for a strange mixture of emotions. He walked to his desk and pressed one of a row of pearl buttons. The door popped open, and Miss Walsh, pale and agitated, hurried in, notebook and pencil in hand. She slid into a chair, notebook on knee, pencil poised.

"This is to be telephoned at once," Gillian said, "to all city editors. Mr. Dale Torrent, the motion picture star, has forsaken his screen career to become Gillian Hazeltine's junior partner. Messrs. Hazeltine and Torrent will be accessible to reporters and press photographers between one and two this afternoon, in the Hazeltine offices. Phone that immediately."

"Y-yes, s-sir," Miss Walsh stuttered.

She flew to the door.

"Mr. Torrent will use Mr. Remsen's office temporarily," Gillian said crisply. "Have a sign painter come in at once and paint Mr. Torrent's name on the door. Also, call up Biltmeyer's and have them rush out a thousand letterheads with Mr. Torrent's name printed the same size as mine, as junior partner.— Will you show Mr. Torrent his office?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Hazeltine," breathed his bedazzled secretary.

CHAPTER III.

MUNCHAUSEN.

WHEN the delightedly grinning young actor had followed Miss Walsh out of the room, Gillian phoned his house. His beautiful red-headed wife answered.

"Anything on for dinner to-night?" Gillian asked her.

"No, dear."

"I'd like to bring a guest. It's—uh—Dale Torrent."

There was a long hesitation at the other end, to which Gillian listened intently.

"Not the—not the one who punches girls in the nose?" Vee said in a shaky voice.

"Yes. The king of treat-'em-rough."

"*Darling!*" his wife squealed.

And Gillian wondered what it was about Dale Torrent that made women coo, shriek, squeal and scream. If only he knew, he reflected, he would have the answer to one of life's greatest riddles.

At dinner that evening, he watched Vee more attentively than usual. Even in his immaculate, perfectly fitting dress suit, Dale Torrent was no handsomer than a great many young men who had sat at this table. Yet Vee was as dreamy-eyed, as dazzled, as Miss Walsh had been. There was no logical excuse, Gillian reasoned, for either Vee or Miss Walsh to get that way about Dale Torrent. Celebrities were no novelty to either of them. Celebrities were familiar sights in his office—familiar guests in his home.

Well, then, what was it? Did Vee, the most level-headed, rational young woman Gillian had ever known, feel same primitive response to Hollywood's most popular girl-puncher? Did she, in her secret heart of hearts, yearn to have the half of a grapefruit or a honeydew melon pushed into her face, or to have her jaw fractured by a man who jeered?

For the first time in their married life, Gillian wondered if Vee would love him more if occasionally he wal-

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loped her in the jaw. Looking at her beautiful, slim little chin, he sighed.

THEY were having coffee and brandy before a cheery log fire in the living room when Toro, Gillian's Japanese house man, came pit-patting in on felt soles with a telegram for Dale Torrent. The young man read the telegram and grinned.

"Gabriel over Hollywood!" he exclaimed, and passed along the yellow blank to Gillian. "Exhibit A for the defense."

The message was somewhat wistful.

YOU CANNOT BE SERIOUS ABOUT THIS LEGAL TOMFOOLERY STOP IF YOU WISH TO RETURN UNDER NEW CONTRACT AT ONE THOUSAND PER WEEK ALL WILL BE FORGIVEN AND FORGOTTEN STOP WIRE
S. LINCOLN FISHBEIN

Gillian looked up. "What's the answer?"

"It was Sam who laid the egg. So let him sit on it till it hatches!"

Gillian scribbled on the back of the telegraph blank:

"S. Lincoln Fishbein, Hollywood, Calif.
On advice of senior partner cannot accept your absurd offer Stop am very serious about legal career
Dale Torrent

Then he gave the telegram to Toro to take out to the messenger boy.

Toro returned a few minutes later to announce that Mr. Hazeltine had a caller. In his impeccable English, Toro said:

"Mr. Waldo Chine wishes me to convey his felicitations and to say that he would like very much to see you on a most urgent matter."

With a groan, Gillian said, "Oh, all right. Send him in."

Vee made a little grimace and excused herself. Gillian explained to Dale Torrent:

"This fellow is my richest client, and the world's biggest nuisance. He is one of America's few remaining millionaires—and a complete old rogue. He spends his time figuring out ways to beat the government on his income tax. He is always up to some kind of skullduggery. Every time he goes abroad, he gets into a jam with the customs, trying to smuggle in precious stones and French perfume. Even though he has no need to. He is Peck's Bad Boy, grown old and senile. His idea of a lawyer is a man who will help him to bribe his way out of one hopeless jam after another. He pays me forty thousand a year just to keep him out of jails, workhouses and prisons. He made his money in mining and smelting, and probably he is the world's most detestable old man.—Notice his left hand. He has a cleft thumb.—He says he's going to be buried, when his time comes, in a solid gold coffin."

Toro ushered Waldo Chine into the living room. One glimpse of him was enough to confirm all of the things Gillian had said. He was a small, skinny old man; he wouldn't have tipped the scales at more than one hundred and twenty pounds. His gray hair, thin and greasy, was slicked back from a sloping forehead which, with the rest of his face, had an oily sheen. His eyes were of the popping type, and of an oystery color. He had a large, wet, rubbery mouth.

Most millionaires are disappointing, however; and Waldo Chine looked like a card sharp. There was something offensive even in the way he came gliding into the room.

He gave Gillian a foxy smile, and glared at the motion picture star.

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"Who is this?" he snapped.

Gillian answered calmly, "This is Mr. Dale Torrent, my new assistant."

"His face," the old man barked, "is vaguely familiar."

"He has been in public life," Gillian said. "What's on your mind, Waldo? Sit down."

THE millionaire extended his claws to the fire. The thumb of his left hand had no nail; and its pale pink flesh was queerly indented for perhaps a half inch, so that the thumb had two ends, like little stumps of fingers. On the forefinger of his other hand he wore a steel horseshoe nail fashioned into a ring. His hands were trembling. He was pale, and he looked agitated.

"I can't sit down!" he snarled. "A most horrible thing has happened. I've just come back from a week's fishing trip in Canada, and an hour ago I went to my house. The butler refused to let me in!"

Gillian murmured, "That's odd. Why?"

"I haven't the slightest idea!" Waldo Chine cried. "I rang the doorbell. Rufus opened the door, and just stared at me. I said, 'What's the matter with you, Rufus?'—And he said, 'Who are you?'—'Are you crazy, Rufus?' I said. 'I am Mr. Chine.'—And what do you suppose he said then? He said, 'You are not Mr. Waldo Chine at all. You must be an impostor!'"

Gillian said, "Very strange.—Then what happened?"

"I went around the house, trying all the doors and windows.—All locked! At the kitchen door, the cook met me with a meat cleaver. 'Get out of here, you impostor!" she yelled.—So I went back to the front door and tried my pass-key. It wouldn't work—the lock had been changed! So I rang and rang, and finally Rufus opened the door again. By this time I knew who was back of it all. My niece!—I said, 'Rufus, tell Brenda I want a word with her.'

"I think Brenda had been hovering in the hall. She came and stared at me and said, 'Rufus, who is this creature?' And Rufus said, 'I'm sure I don't know, Miss Chine.' I yelled at her, 'This farce has gone far enough, Brenda. I am your uncle, and you know it. Let me in this house!'—And what do you suppose that she-devil said?"

Mr. Chine looked imploringly at Gillian.

The old man's oystery eyes were watery with self-pity.

Gillian shook his head. "What did she say, Waldo?"

"She said, 'Rufus,' she said, 'this man doesn't even look like my Uncle Waldo. If he is a beggar, give him something to eat at the back door.' I said, 'Brenda, you haven't seen me in two years. Let me in. Let me explain.'"

"Explain what?" Gillian broke in.

"That was her Uncle Waldo!—What did she do, Gillian?"

The millionaire was wringing his hands, and Gillian thought whimsically that if a hawk could have wrung its claws the gesture would have looked very much the same.

"She slammed the door in my face!" Chine went on. "So I came directly here. Now, is that a pretty situation, or isn't it? What does it mean? What's back of it? Is it some diabolical plot—or what?"

Gillian looked over the tip of his tilted cigar at the embers in the fireplace. Dreamily, Gillian said: "Dale,

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you've heard what this old rascal has just said. What do you make of it?"

THE actor shot a startled glance at the millionaire. Waldo Chine seemed unaware that he had been referred to as an old rascal.

"It seems mighty mysterious to me," Dale Torrent answered.

"There are apt to be several sides to it," Gillian went on. "To begin with, this fellow is one of the most preposterous old liars on earth. He would rather lie than tell the truth."

Dale Torrent shot another alarmed glance at the millionaire. But it was evident that Gillian knew his client very well. The old man did not appear to be in the least offended. He seemed, on the contrary, to be amused—even pleased. He was smiling, preening himself like a degenerate old turkey gobbler.

Waldo Chine chortled.

"Well," he said, "maybe I was lying—just a little."

Gillian blew a smoke ring at the ceiling. "You haven't really just come back from a fishing trip in Canada, have you?"

"As a matter of fact, no," the old man admitted.

"As a matter of fact, you haven't been away at all?" Gillian pursued.

"That's right. I haven't been away at all." The oily old man shot a glance at Dale Torrent. "Gillian's smart," he said. "Smart as a whip!"

Gillian took the compliment in his stride. "Why did Brenda refuse to let you into the house?"

"Women are strange," the old man muttered.

"Don't you know, Waldo?"

"I do not!"

"When did Brenda get back from Paris?"

"Only this afternoon."

"Ah, yes!—She saw, then, what you've done to that beautiful old house. And naturally, she was furious. Being a girl of spirit, she simply kicked you out. Didn't she?"

"As a matter of fact, she did.—Well, I locked myself in my room. She wouldn't send me up any dinner. She—she starved me out. And you know how important food is to me."

Gillian knew, for Waldo Chine was an old gourmand.

"When I came out, she had Rufus throw me out of the house," Chine continued.

"And the cook didn't threaten you with a cleaver?"

"As a matter of fact, she didn't. I just made that up."

"Well, what do you want me to do?" Gillian demanded.

"Bring suit against her!—Wasn't it felonious assault?"

"Did she strike you with a fist, or with any object; did she kick you in any part of your anatomy, or in any other way visit violence upon your person?"

"AS a matter of fact, she didn't. She told Rufus to put me out; and Rufus took me by my collar and the slack of my pants and ran me out of the house. You can imagine my embarrassment! Isn't there some law making it a crime to run a man out of his own house?"

"There certainly is. But as it happens, it isn't your house. It's her house."

"What of it?" the millionaire cried. "Anyway, I'm going to get revenge on that girl for humiliating me. You're my lawyer. Drag her into court on any charge! I don't care how much it costs!"

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"Wait a minute," Gillian said. "Let me think."

He puffed reflectively at his cigar, and studied the glowing embers. Since he had undertaken to help Dale Torrent, he had been wondering how he could manage to give the young man some sensational publicity — the kind that would impress movie magnets like Sam Fishbein and Ike Nussbaum. This might be the answer. The amazing private life of a millionaire and his internationally celebrated niece, aired in the courtroom! A family row between this notorious old rascal and the much talked about, written about, and photographed Brenda Chine!

Brenda, Gillian reasoned, was the sort of girl who did not mind publicity. At least, she didn't seem to. She had made headlines in Paris by throwing a bowl of champagne punch over the Duc de Bergeron; he, the dispatches said, had accused her of the same money madness that afflicted all Americans. It was broadly hinted that she had previously rejected the proposal of marriage of the penniless Duc de Bergeron.

She had afterward given out fiery interviews, telling what she thought of the French nation in general, and of the Duc de Bergeron in particular.

No, Gillian reflected, a girl like Brenda Chine would not mind the publicity of a courtroom fight with her uncle. It should be a front page story for days—the beautiful and spirited Brenda *versus* her notorious old uncle, with the celebrated Hollywood girl-slapper, guided by Gillian, representing the plaintiff!

"Very well," Gillian said, "we'll bring suit against Brenda. We will charge her with malicious persecution. She is sure to lick us, but I don't suppose you care about that."

"First of all," the millionaire said anxiously, "you've got to arrange to let me get my things out of that house. There are certain things of mine which no one must disturb."

"We'll drive out right now and have a talk with Brenda," Gillian answered. "Have you your car, Waldo?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Torrent and I will follow you."

Gillian suffered a qualm of doubt. He wondered just how a young man who specialized in punching girls' noses would hit it off with a girl who threw punch at men who displeased her.

CHAPTER IV.

GOLD HOARDER.

ON the drive out to the Chine estate, Gillian gave Dale Torrent a thumbnail sketch of the situation.

"Brenda Chine is beautiful, rich, clever and impulsive. She once rode a horse into Denver's largest department store—on a bet. Another time, she exchanged every stitch of clothing she had on with a shabby girl whom she saw crying on the street—then went on to a reception being given for the Queen of Roumania, and introduced herself as Raggedy Ann. That happened here in Greenfield, and it was a nine days' scandal. I only wanted to warn you that it is very difficult to predict what she will do next."

"Oh, I've read about her in the papers," Hollywood's boy friend said. "She sounds like a spoiled brat."

Gillian said quickly, "At all events, her father and uncle were partners in one of the biggest mining and smelting combines in the West. They sold out to other big interests about ten years ago. At her father's death, Brenda in-

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herited his fortune — a whopper. I don't know how much is left.— Waldo is easily worth thirty million. He has called practically every turn of the stock market, in the past four years; and he'd sell his pet horse to a glue factory if the price was right.

"Here's the nub of the present ruckus: After her father's death, Brenda transformed the Chine mansion into one of the handsomest places in this section. It had been an eyesore. She remodeled it along Virginia colonial lines—slender white pillars, a snow-white house of beautiful design, emerald-green shutters. She had fine old shade trees planted all about the house. When she'd finished with it, it was the most restful, most beautiful place you ever saw.

"About three years ago, Waldo came from Utah to live there. Why, God knows. And shortly after that, she suddenly packed up and went abroad, where she's been ever since. And since she's been in Europe, Waldo's done some remodeling along his own lines.—Wait till you see it!— This house, incidentally, will figure importantly in Waldo's suit against Brenda. We will lose the case against her, but you will get ten million dollars' worth of good Hollywood publicity."

"How old is this woman?" the actor asked.

"About twenty-three."

Gillian sent him an anxious glance, but Dale's classic countenance was in repose.

A few minutes later, they followed Waldo's tail-light into a driveway of crushed bluestone. A sharp turn brought the house into view.

"Good Lord!" Dale Torrent said.

He saw the house in the light of a crescent moon. It stood on a knoll, and it resembled a brooding buzzard. The knoll was bare of trees. All the beautiful shade trees had been removed. The building itself had been painted a dull, sooty black. The columns were slate-gray. There was something stark and sinister about this architectural monster—something ugly and obscene; something that sent shivers of distaste and apprehension along your spine.

"Did that old fox do this?" Dale demanded.

"All of it."

"Why?"

"Spite, perhaps. But the chances are that he likes this kind of house."

The old fox had parked his Rolls Royce coupé near the slate-gray steps, behind a maroon Cadillac roadster. He was waiting in the shadow for Gillian, and whispered to him:

"You do the talking. But whatever happens, get me inside that house!"

"I'll do my best," Gillian promised, and pressed the door button.

THE door was presently opened by a tall, cadaverous butler with a hawk's nose and hawk-like eyes. He stared suspiciously at Gillian, at Dale, but when he saw Waldo Chine lurking there, grinning at him, his crack of a mouth vanished entirely.

"Tell Miss Chine," Gillian said briskly, "that Gillian Hazeltine is here—waving a white flag for all he's worth."

"Very good, sir," the butler said stiffly, and firmly closed the door upon the trio.

"Remember!" the millionaire whispered hoarsely. "Don't take no for an answer!"

"And you remember this," Gillian answered. "You are to behave yourself.—No tricks!"

The door was reopened. The butler had a displeased look.

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"Miss Chine will see Mr. Hazeltine," he said with dignity. He held the door open. Waldo, chuckling, scuttled in and started rapidly down the hall.

"Wait!" Gillian said.

"Wait!" the butler echoed. "Miss Chine has given express orders that Mr. Chine is not to go down cellar."

With a peevish look, the old rascal returned. Dale Torrent was looking about the hall, making gasping sounds. Gillian had grown somewhat accustomed to the horror of it. The floor was of cement, laid in blocks, like a sidewalk. The walls were slate gray. The woodwork was dull black. There were no rugs; no hangings of any description. That hall was as dismal as the entrance to a warehouse or a mausoleum.

The three men followed the butler to a closed gray door. He opened it upon a large drawing room, with a cement block floor, dismal gray walls, black woodwork.

Candles set about on tables and logs burning in a huge fireplace did little to soften the cheerless air of this great, grim, dismal room. A man and a girl were seated on a long, low, black bench close to the fire. The man was holding the girl's hand in his. The look he was giving her was one of lovesick longing. As Gillian approached, the man released her hand and frowned a little at the interruption.

Both man and girl stood up. Gillian only glanced at the man, who was tall, blond and blue-eyed. Brenda Chine was one of the most beautiful young women he had ever seen. And she was beautiful in a way that belied her reputation. She wasn't tall and dashing, as one might have expected. She was a little thing, slim and soft, and as feminine as a powder puff. Her eyes were as large, and as dark and gentle, as a gazelle's. Only her dark red hair gave any hint of her famous temperament.

The firelight glowed and softly glistened on her hair, on her slim white arms, on her lovely shoulders. She was like a little princess, in her evening gown of jade-green. She wore no jewelry except a string of small, square emeralds.

THE smile which she gave Gillian was sweet and charming. He would have been deceived if he hadn't known her so well; if he hadn't seen the storm warnings in her large, beautiful dark eyes. She gave Gillian her little white hand and said:

"Gillian, I hope you don't intend to argue with me about this old rogue."

"No," Gillian said.

She looked past the lawyer at the tall, distinguished young man who stared at her with cool speculation. It was apparent that Dale Torrent wasn't carried away by her loveliness.

"Who is this?" Miss Chine asked.

Gillian smiled. "My new junior partner. You perhaps read about him in tonight's papers."

"I never read the papers."

"But you recognize him, of course."

Miss Chine was staring with large, puzzled eyes at Hollywood's boy friend. She shook her lovely little head.

"I'm afraid I don't, Gillian."

"He is—" Gillian said, and paused dramatically "—Dale Torrent!"

He watched her beautiful, sensitive little face as he said it, but it did not change. It remained puzzled.

"I'm afraid the name means nothing to me."

"The motion picture star!" Gillian cried.

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"Oh," she said. "I detest the movies! I never go to them."

"Really?" Dale Torrent drawled.

"Yes, really—I'm so sorry!"

But she didn't look sorry. She looked impish. And Gillian was thankful that no halved melons or grapefruits were handy. He knew that Dale was a gentleman, but he didn't know how far Dale was to be trusted with any girl who might possibly need a slight punch in the nose. And he was sure that Brenda was deliberately high-hatting the young man.

Sweetly, she was now introducing her companion, the blond man. His hair was crisply golden. His eyes were sapphire blue. He was handsome, in an aristocratic way.

"This is Stewart Noon, Gillian."

Shaking hands, Gillian said, "I've heard about you. You're the new assistant district attorney."

"Your worst enemy's right-hand man," Mr. Noon affirmed, with an engaging grin. "I've been looking forward to this. My first free moment, I was going to call."

"Have lunch with me to-morrow?" Gillian said.

"Thanks. I'd be delighted to."

Brenda Chine made an impatient little gesture. "Will you gentlemen sit down?—You can sit down, too, Uncle Waldo," she added, indifferently.

"I'm no gentleman," Uncle Waldo chortled. "And I'm proud of it!"

Miss Chine, seating herself on the stool, looked up seriously at Gillian. "Now, just what has this dreadful old man been telling you?"

"That you kicked him out of this house, for no apparent reason."

"That's, as usual, a lie, Gillian. I kicked him out when I saw what he'd done to my house.—Do you blame me?"

"Not at all, Brenda."

"He ripped up my lovely oak floors and poured concrete ones. He covered my beautiful old mahogany woodwork with this hellish black paint. He chopped down all my grand old trees. Heaven only knows what he's done with my rugs, hangings and canvases. Would you blame me if I had shot him instead?"

"Not in the least," Gillian murmured.

"THREE years ago," the girl said, in her crisp, sweet voice, "he came here and admired this house. He begged me to let him come and live here. Because it was so homelike. I didn't remember him well enough, or I wouldn't have consented. So I let him move in. We did nothing but quarrel, after that. I got so fed up that I went to Paris and stayed there. I came back to-day, intending to order him to move out. And when I saw what he'd done to this lovely place, I had him thrown out.—I haven't told you the worst of it. He has built some devilish contraption or other in the basement. Under the western half of the house he's blocked off a huge space with steel walls. There's a door at each end, like a door on a bank vault. He refuses to tell me what's going on inside that steel room."

Gillian looked at the old rascal. Waldo was smiling foxily.

"I may as well come clean," the old man said. "I've built a little still in there. I wanted to make some good old Utah corn licker. I hate this bootleg stuff! Bah! Hogwash!—So I built myself this little old still down there—"

"He's lying again," Brenda said with a weary little sigh. "I've snooped

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around down there, Gillian. I've smelled strange smells—very hot metal smells, and the smell of nitric acid. He can't fool me, Gillian. You know, I practically grew up in a Colorado smelter."

"She's being ridiculous again," the old man snorted.

"And who is that horrible little human spider who spends all his time down there?" Brenda demanded of Waldo Chine.

"A moonshine expert from Utah," the old rascal answered. "He used to make mountain dew for me out there. I brought him here, and I built this still exactly the way those good old Utah stills are built."

Brenda sighed. "Why did you put a great firebrick chimney up through the house—right up through the middle of my bedroom?"

"Did he do that?" Gillian gasped. "He did!"

Again Gillian turned accusing eyes on Waldo.

"You old liar!" he said. "What's going on down there in—?"

He stopped. The old rogue looked scared. He had lost all his color. His face had changed to the appearance of a fish's belly, shiny and wet and white.

"I'll move everything out to-morrow," he said eagerly. "That's a promise."

"Every stick and stitch and scrap," Brenda said firmly.

"Yes, yes! And I'll do more than that. I'll pay to have this house restored in every particular to the way it was when you went abroad.— Gladly!"

Gillian, looking at the man's shiny white face, his rubbery, frightened old mouth, said sternly:

"Waldo, I want a little chat with you in private. Excuse us, Brenda."

Reluctantly, with rolling, oystery eyes, the old rascal accompanied Gillian into the hall.

The lawyer was afraid Waldo was going to collapse. Closing the door, Gillian said sternly: "Come clean. What's going on in that steel room downstairs?"

"I positively told you the truth!"

"You old liar! You're up to more of your deviltry!"

"No, Gillian!"

"Do I have to call in a safe-blower and find out?"

"No!" cried Waldo Chine, then hesitated, giving Gillian a foxy smile. "Well—I may need your help on it later, anyway. So I'll show you. Come along."

GILLIAN followed him out through the kitchen, to a door which gave upon a flight of steps. Down they went into a spacious modern basement. It must have been an acre in area. It was divided into two long, wide corridors; and perhaps a hundred feet away, the corridor on the right was blocked by a shining steel wall. Gillian saw the heads of rivets; saw the steel door which Brenda had likened to the door of a vault.

As they approached the door, Gillian detected those odors which Brenda had mentioned—the odors of hot metal and acid.

Waldo took out a large steel key. It was of a strange pattern, with a diamond-shaped head, a long, tapering steel shank with notches filed in both edges of the shank. Gillian had never seen a key quite like it. The old rascal fitted the key into the lock. He was chortling.

"You're going to get a big surprise, Gillian! You're going to say I'm the

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foxiest old rascal you ever met! This makes anything I've ever done before look pretty pale!"

He turned the key, dramatically swung the door open.

A blast of intensely dry air, with a burned smell, smote Gillian's nostrils. It was like opening the door of an oven.

His eyes were momentarily dazzled by the terrific pink glare of a miniature sun. The air fairly writhed with heat and the stench of acid. Gillian caught a bewildering impression of electric cables, crawling about like great serpents; of an enormous firebrick ventilator above the miniature pink sun; of ingot molds.

Along one wall were five huge vats of thick clear glass, out of which an evil white mist rose in clouds, to be drawn off up another ventilator. A grayish-yellow mound in the bottom of each vat sent a cloud of fine bubbles up into the liquid.

A queer looking figure, like a gnome, was just dumping the yellowish contents of a canvas bag into one of the vats. As he tossed the bag to a pile in a bushel basket, he saw Waldo and Gillian. He came springing toward them, a grotesque creature.

In the pink glare of the miniature sun, he looked evil and dangerous. He looked, indeed, like an enormous spider. He was naked to the waist. His arms and legs were curved and black with tangled hair. On his thick chest was a mat of hair like a bear's pelt. Black hair grew out of his ears and nostrils. His eyebrows were bristling black tufts. The hair on his head was blue-black, like the hair of a gorilla. His eyes were small, beady and black, like a spider's.

Gillian would not have been surprised if this creature had suddenly dropped to all fours and come scuttling toward him with horrible snarls.

THE spider man did, in fact, pick up a bar of steel and start toward him. But Waldo said hastily:

"It's all right, Fowler! It's quite all right. This is Gillian Hazeltine, my lawyer. Gillian, this is Fowler Shank, the greatest molder in America!"

The greatest molder in America said in a thin, nasal voice, "Why'd you bring him down here?"

"I couldn't avoid it. Besides, we may need him.— Go right on with your work, Fowler."

The old rascal looked up at Gillian and grinned. "Do you get it, Gillian?" he chuckled. "Do you get it?"

Gillian nodded. He had got it. He watched the spider man pick up another canvas bag. This time, when the greatest molder in America decanted the contents of the bag into one of the vats, Gillian was aware of what the contents were. They went spilling in a shining, thick stream into the vat —gold pieces! Ten- and twenty-dollar gold pieces!

"That's a nitric acid solution," the old rogue was saying. "It eats the alloy out of the gold, leaving the pure metal. You can't sell alloyed gold to the treasury. I mean, they'd catch you at it, if the alloy was in the ingots. You've got to sell it pretty pure. Do you get the idea?"

"Yes," Gillian said quietly. "I get the idea.—I suppose you're aware that it's a mighty serious offense to destroy United States coinage?"

"What of it? How can they catch me? I saw the present gold situation coming, long before most people did. I was smart! I bought gold, gold, gold."

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"You mean, you hoarded gold."

"You bet I did!—And never was caught at it, either.—I turned stocks and bonds and bank balances into gold coin. When the Government called in all the gold, I had—well, I had pretty near a half-million dollars in gold coin! Figure it out for yourself. A half-million, when gold was only worth $20.67 an ounce. And now gold is up about sixty per cent. That half-million is worth close to eight hundred thousand!

"Oh, of course there's some 'shrinkage.' There isn't quite twenty dollars' worth of gold, at the old price, in a twenty-dollar gold piece. But that doesn't cut into my profits much—

"Here's how we work it. First, we dump the gold coins into these vats. When the acid stops working, we dump the gold into that electric furnace, melt it down and cast it into small ingots. But damn it, of course, Brenda had to come back and spoil things, just when I was ready to make the first shipment!"

"To the mint?" Gillian asked.

"Oh, no!" the old rogue chortled. "I'm smarter than that. It goes to my smelter in Utah. That's one of my old properties, near a petered-out gold mine. There isn't any gold in the mine, but what do I care? The idea is, I ship it there—and from there it's shipped to the mint in San Francisco."

GILLIAN was looking at a large iron or steel mold near the electric furnace. It would cast a billet nearly six feet long, by two and a half feet wide, by a foot thick. Nearby was a platform scale of a two-ton capacity.

Waldo said quickly, "We once thought of casting billets that size—so heavy that they couldn't be handily stolen. But we gave it up; we never used that mold."

Yet Gillian could see evidences of heat in the mold—the blue look of scorched metal. He knew that the old rogue was, as usual, lying.

He made a quick estimate. A golden billet cast in that mold must weigh close to a ton. And a ton of gold at the new price was worth a more fabulous sum. Where was this billet?

"How much gold," he asked, "does this furnace melt down at a run?"

"Oh, not much. Maybe ten thousand dollars' worth."

Gillian knew better. It would be closer to a million judging from the size of that billet. Waldo was lying again. Gillian wondered just how far from the truth was Waldo's stated half-million dollar hoard.

The old rascal was rubbing his hands together, chuckling. The pink glare from the furnace glistened greasily on his flushed face; glittered in his popping oystery eyes. He looked like an evil old ogre.

"I ask you," he chortled, "where could a man invest a half-million dollars in these days, and get so much in interest? Isn't it a wonderful business proposition? Did you ever hear of a smarter one, Gillian? Isn't it the smartest business proposition you ever heard of, since gold was first made into coins? Eh?—Am I clever?"

Gillian's face had become pale. His jaws were clamped together. His lips and eyes held a menacing look.

"Waldo," he said, in a quiet, sinister voice, "did you ever check up on your ancestry, to see if you're descended from Nero — the millionaire who played a fiddle while Rome burned?—Or possibly King Midas?"

"No, Gillian," Uncle Waldo vaguely answered. "But now you see why

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you've got to fix it up with Brenda to give me enough time to smuggle all this gold and apparatus out of here."

"You old scoundrel!" Gillian exploded. "I've stood by while you've cheated and chiseled the Government in every way you could think of. I've spent sleepless nights, figuring out ways to get you out of jams; to keep you from behind bars. Damn your hide, Waldo! It would be a waste of breath to mention the word *patriotism* to you. You'd only chortle. All this country means to you—and ever has meant—is a liberal chance to plunder and chisel. You're too selfish and greedy to realize that this country is in its most difficult financial crisis.

"Why do you suppose President Roosevelt called in all the gold? To give sneak-thieves like you a chance to do more plundering? Don't you realize, you damned old thief, that what you're doing here is downright treason? It isn't chiseling. What you're doing here is nothing less than kicking your country when she's down! But you can't understand that, damn you! To you, your country's misfortune and distress is nothing but a chance to make an enormous profit! You ought to be hung!"

The look in Uncle Waldo's eyes sickened him; it was such a slimy look. Gillian snapped his jaws shut and started for the door.

The old man squawked, "Hey, what are you goin' to do?"

Gillian snarled, "I haven't decided. — Get out of my way!"

"Going to squeal on me?"

Gillian stopped in his tracks. He wheeled about.

"By God, I think I will! Turn you in to the treasury department! Put you where you belong!"

At that, the spider man dropped a bag of gold which fell with a muffled clank to the concrete floor. He picked up the steel bar.

"If you squeal," Waldo shrieked, "I'll kill you!"

CHAPTER V.

THE LEFT HAND.

GILLIAN walked rapidly out of that atmosphere of nitric acid fumes and withering electric heat. The millionaire yelled after him:

"I mean it!—I'll kill you if you squeal!"

Behind him, Gillian heard the spider man begin to curse. Then the millionaire and the spider man were cursing each other. There would be trouble back there. But Gillian didn't care. Let them kill each other, for all of him!

Striding to the stairs which led up to the kitchen, Gillian tried to put his thoughts in order. In the course of his career, he had been accused of many things. But he had never been accused of injustice, and he had never been accused of a lack of patriotism. He had seen enough in that steel room in the basement of Brenda Chine's house to realize that her rascally old uncle must have more than a million in gold in hoarding. Perhaps two million! Perhaps much more!

Gillian realized that no more cunning an attack could be made deliberately on the weak economic condition of the country than this one of Waldo Chine's. Greedy, selfish, wholly detestable, the sly old man did not care. He was without the slightest affection for his country.

Reporting him to the authorities was another matter, however. Like most

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men, Gillian detested a tattle-tale. Yet he felt very strongly that he should report to the Treasury Department what he had seen in that steel room. And it occurred to him, as he reached the kitchen, that the disclosure would be a national sensation. Waldo Chine, one of the country's few remaining millionaires, would be revealed as not only hoarding gold for gold's sake, but preparing to fatten his riches by selling his hoard to the United States mint at an enormous profit!—Yes, it woud be a national scandal, a national sensation.

It now occurred to Gillian that he might kill two birds with one stone. He might let Dale Torrent have the credit for uncovering this gigantic piece of crookedness!—Why not? Gillian decided that he would, at all events, discuss it with Hollywood's boy friend.

He went on into the great, gloomy drawing room. Dale Torrent was not there. Nor was Brenda Chine. Sitting alone on the low bench before the log fire was Stewart Noon, the new assistant district attorney, and he looked more lovelorn than ever. He was facing the fire, with his face in his hands, his elbows on his knees.

Gillian glanced from the sad-looking young man to two chairs and a table which had been overturned on the floor behind him. One of the chairs was smashed.

Gillian said sharply, "What's been going on here?"

The young man before the fireplace slowly turned his head. At first Gillian believed that Stewart Noon's left eye was in shadow. Then Gillian saw, with amazement, that that left eye was purple and black!

He looked closer. There was no doubt about it. The blond man, since Gillian had been in the basement, had somehow mysteriously acquired a black eye. A beauty!

"WHERE is Brenda?" Gillian cried.

"Upstairs," the new assistant district attorney said, peevishly. "In her room.—Oh, I don't know where she is. Maybe she's chinning herself on a tree. Maybe she's somewhere trying to stop a nosebleed!"

"A nosebleed!" Gillian gasped. "Where is Dale Torrent?"

"Out there," Mr. Noon answered, jabbing with his thumb. "Pacing up and down that terrace. Gazing at the moon. Counting the stars. Dreaming thoughts of Hollywood, maybe.—Why the hell don't you ask him?" he asked with sudden savageness.

"Did Brenda give you that mouse?" Gillian gently inquired.

"Certainly not!"

"My dear fellow," Gillian said, "I'm naturally curious to know what's been happening here. In fact, I've *got* to know."

The blond man grunted. "He punched Brenda in the nose."

"What!" Gillian cried. "You're joking. He couldn't have punched Brenda in the nose!"

"Why in hell couldn't he? That's his profession, isn't it—punching girls in the nose?"

"Then what happened?" Gillian panted.

"Then I took a pass at him—naturally."

"Naturally," Gillian agreed. "You couldn't stand by and see the girl you love punched in the nose."

"I took a pass at him," the blond man growled, "and he socked me in the eye. I fell over two chairs and a table. He told me to come ahead and

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get the rest of it. Then Brenda threw the fire tongs at him—and they both vanished in different directions, she out that door, and he out that one."

"Who started this shambles?" Gillian sternly interrupted.

"Oh, Brenda was riding him. She was panning the movies. She said that an actor was nothing but a sissy.—And before I could stop him, he popped her one in the nose. I could hardly believe my eyes."

"Did she hit him with the fire tongs?"

"Yes. On the back of the neck. But it was only a glancing blow. He only jeered at her, and they both went in opposite directions. He called her a spoiled brat. She called him a ham."

Gillian had managed not to laugh. He had even suppressed an almost insuppressible smile.

He took out a cigar and offered another to Mr. Noon. The assistant district attorney accepted it with a shaking hand.

"It's been a pretty tough day for Brenda," Stewart Noon said. "As if finding what her uncle had done to this house wasn't enough, she's also learned that she's lost her fortune."

"All of it?" Gillian was incredulous.

"I believe so. When you came in this evening, I was telling her she'd better be nicer to her Uncle Waldo. In spite of their enmity, he's willed her everything he has."

The blond man stopped. In the silence, Gillian heard the distant, muffled voice of anger. In fact, two voices. Listening, he identified Uncle Waldo's shrill, furious voice, then the spider man's. They were shrieking at each other.

Stewart Noon gasped, "Good Lord! What's going on? They're in the cellar, aren't they?"

"Yes."

"They must be killing each other. I'd better see what I can do."

The blond man jumped up and walked rapidly to the door, letting himself out. Gillian, listening, heard the sound of his rapid footsteps. Stewart Noon was running. Gillian was beginning to suspect that there were more sides to this strange situation than greeted the eye.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Squirrels Take Ferry Ride

THOUSANDS of squirrels have been traveling westward at top speed during the past few months, having found food scarce in New England and the Atlantic States. A swarm of about seven hundred was seen swimming the Connecticut River. One tried to clamber aboard a rowboat, but the others were in too much of a hurry. Many have been observed navigating the Hudson at New York City. Recently a dozen boarded a ferryboat at Yonkers. Though crew and passengers entered whole-heartedly into a squirrel hunt, only one of the hungry creatures was caught. The other eleven alighted safely at Alpine and continued their westward journey. Thousands of squirrel travelers have enjoyed free dinners at Palisades Interstate Park, where two bushels of peanuts have been scattered daily.

J. W. Holden.

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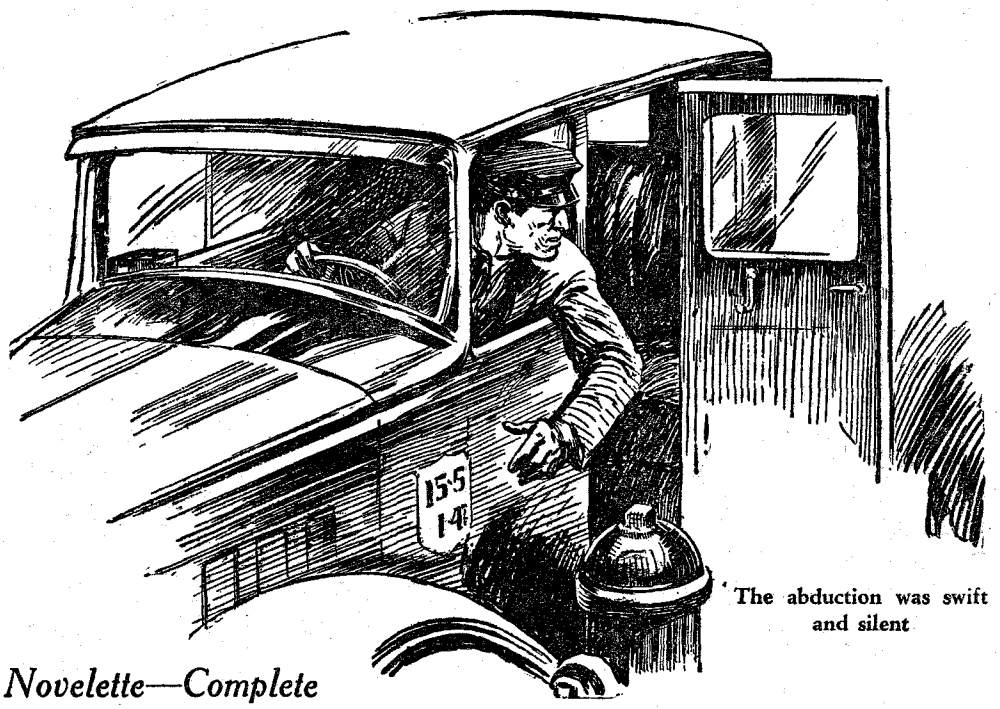
Hideaway Island

By EUSTACE L. ADAMS

Author of "Death on Seadrome Three," "Wings in the Silence," etc.

Doom strikes silently and secretly at the city's leading public enemies—what does it mean?



The abduction was swift and silent

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

BATTLE PLANS.

WHEN Snatch Rosen, overlord of racketeersmen, trafficker at wholesale in kidnaping, extortion, liquor and a hundred major and minor rackets, disappeared from his accustomed Broadway haunts, the underworld decided that he had merely dropped from sight until public indignation about his most recent kidnaping job had died away.

But when, in rapid succession, the three next most important figures in the underworld, Hymie Nodine, Big Hennesy and Ace Dupont, were whisked away amid the staccato chatter of machine guns, the smoothly purring wheels of organized crime in New York came to a clanking stop. All four vanished men had been regarded as invulnerable, so huge had been their operations, so rich had been their takings in the big business of modern thuggery.

Not even their disorganized henchmen knew exactly what had happened

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to them. Had they been slaughtered by professional gunmen, their followers might have understood, for murder is an understandable and predictable act in the circles in which the four vanished men ruled. Had their well-organized mobs received ransom notes, that, too, would have clarified the matter in the eyes of both police and gangsters. But to vanish into the silence of the unknown, and to remain vanished—that was something else again, and a ripple of fear spread through the underworld from New York to San Francisco.

Police openly rejoiced in the sudden blight that fell upon gangland and took advantage of the demoralization to step in and break up rackets that had flourished for years. Federal officers, coming in upon the wave of public approval, struck hard and fast. Newspapers ran out of editions faster than the presses could roll, and—

But that was not the beginning of the affair.

IT was exactly three minutes before midnight and the two young men in the card room of Vance Macklyn's bachelor apartment found their eyes straying frequently to the door.

"I knew you were potty, Vance," said Pete Welch, settling his dinner coat over the growing bulge in his middle. "Imagine thinking that one bird will come all the way from Guatemala and another from Paris, when you didn't even tell them what it was all about!"

Vance pretended to resist

There was no answering smile in the steady gray eyes of his host as Vance Macklyn glanced for the twentieth time at the door.

"You came, didn't you, all the way from Frisco?" Vance Macklyn retorted. "And you didn't know what it was all about."

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"Yeah, I came," agreed Pete Welch gloomily. "But I wouldn't have come if you hadn't reminded me of that promise." As he pulled a crumpled telegram out of his pocket, he looked exactly what he was, a successful young business executive of the post-war breed. Once again he read the wire, this time to the man who already knew what it said, having sent it, together with two just like it.

"'On Armistice Night nearly a dozen of us agreed to obey a summons anywhere, at any time, if one of us needed assistance. I need assistance now. There will be adventure, danger, a lot of fun, if you answer this call. Meet at my apartment, 59 Gramercy, N. Y., midnight, three weeks hence, on October first. Don't reply, just come. Vance Macklyn.'" Pete Welch folded the wire and rubbed his almost-bald head with a gesture of exasperation.

"Are you going to have a whole dozen here?"

"No. Just the four of us. We're the only ones of the old outfit who aren't married, and this is no job for a married man."

At that moment, Anton, Vance's butler valet and man-of-all-work, poked a respectful face through the doorway.

"Mr. Ames," he announced soberly.

"Come in, Red!" Vance shouted.

A tremendous man pushed through the door, a man whose six feet three of bone and muscle moved as gracefully as a professional boxer. His skin, baked by three years of tropic suns and winds, was not tanned; it was burned to a perpetual red that was almost the shade of his crimson thatch of unruly hair. With soundless tread he moved across the floor and enveloped Vance's hand in his mighty grasp.

"Hi, Vance," he boomed. Then, to Pete, "You're fatter than ever, old-timer."

That was all. Prodigal of his gigantic strength Red never wasted a word. Long ago he had learned to allow others to spend themselves in speech while he waited patiently for action.

"Me, fat?" snorted Pete Welch, touched on a sore spot. "Nothing of the kind, you red-headed goof! I'm merely—"

But Anton's face again appeared in the doorway. Macklyn smiled and spoke first.

"That will be Mr. Fairfield, Anton. Come in, Johnny!"

Johnny Fairfield entered. Slight, almost round-shouldered and tanned to the color of weathered mahogany, there was nothing extraordinary about his looks except the extreme brilliance of the blue eyes behind the horn-rimmed glasses. He resembled the deacon of some country parish or, perhaps, an instructor in some freshwater college. With an inward smile, Vance remembered occasions when bigger men had unwisely attempted to take advantage of Johnny's size and of his innocent, peaceable appearance. The results had been catastrophic, for Johnny went into action instantly and with a cold, smiling ferocity that exploded like a Gotha bomb.

"Give me a drink," said Johnnny characteristically. "What's the big idea of the cablegram? Just had a good job offered. Piloting a Chink general, or something, in Manchoukuo. Had to pass it up. What's the row?"

The entire room warmed with Johnny's galvanic personality. Big Red Ames grinned indulgently, as a mastiff might grin at a terrier. Vance Macklyn, as always, forgot most of his troubles when the ebullient Johnny was

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about. Even Pete, chronically pessimistic, managed a smile.

VANCE looked about the room, glad to have these three buddies with him again after all the years that had passed. Others were left of the original gang that comprised that old 199th Pursuit Group, A. E. F., but the rest who lived were married. He was glad that these three had never found the right girl; it would have destroyed the adventurer in them, and that was the quality he needed right now.

It was Pete Welch who had changed the most, Vance decided. He had grown older, more settled, and there were threads of gray in what was left of his thin brown hair. Of the four in the room, Pete alone had become a conventional business man, being chief copy writer in a successful advertising agency on the coast. But there was a solidity about Pete, a steadfast reliability, which might be of great use in the weird enterprise that Vance had undertaken.

Red Ames, big, laconic, dependable, had not changed much. A little graver, perhaps, a little more sparing of words. After the war that was to end all wars, Red had drifted to the hot countries, thinking how fine it would be to be a soldier of fortune. Knowing no other trade than that of a war bird, he had flown, and fought, in a dozen revolutions, and he was respected, and feared, from Texas to Patagonia. But now he had learned that there was no magic in the name "soldier of fortune." It was all soldiering and no one ever made a fortune out of it. But there was something about it that caused his pulse to beat fast. It gave him an occasional high moment which more than made up for the rest. And it promised as good a way to die as any, so he was moderately content.

Johnny Fairfield, carefree, happy-go-lucky and given to a regrettable fondness for hard liquor, was one of those whom war had apparently ruined for useful pursuits. Supported by an allowance from a jaundiced uncle who asked nothing in return save that Johnny remain out of his sight, he led a thoroughly haphazard existence.

He had flown from France against the Riffs, for the Cantonese against various independent armies, had piloted, briefly, a mail plane on the Shanghai-Peiping route and for a year had been the only foreign test pilot at the Fokker works in Holland. But Paris was his headquarters, Henri's bar his address, and from there he dallied with an agency for an American airplane manufacturer. Had he worked at it, he could have made money, but he preferred to play.

Vance himself was rich beyond reason. He had believed until recently that everything could be purchased with money and that there were no thrills left. He owned his own plane, a twin-engined amphibian, and flew it for his own amusement and when he wished quick transportation from his summer place at South Hampton to his private island in the Bahamas, or from Rye to Santa Monica. But now, strangely, he had discovered that life could hold a thrill and he was really happy for the first time in years.

"I'LL tell you what it's all about," he now said, watching Johnny Fairfield gulp down his second highball. "The day I sent out my S. O. S. that brought you eggs together here, I had just received a letter saying that if I did not pay over a quarter of a million dollars to some-

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body on a certain day, I would be kidnaped and held for ransom."

"What ho!" cheered Johnny Fairfield as he reached again for the crystal decanter. "Do they know you've grown up so you have to shave every day?"

"Kidnaping has grown beyond a baby-snatching business," Vance informed him seriously. "Now that the liquor racket is practically dead, the important gangsters are turning in every direction for profitable sources of big money. With the business depression their protection rackets haven't paid what they used to, and the birds who have organized big mobs on a businesslike basis are hard put to keep their gangs together. They've found that kidnaping is one thing that will bring in big wads of money with relatively little labor. And the thing has grown to astonishing proportions."

"Nobody's safe any more," Pete Welch growled. "When the gangsters were kidnaping each other, it was all right. Now anybody who is supposed to have money is likely to get snatched."

"Wish somebody'd kidnap me," boomed Red Ames. "Get my hands around throats. Squeeze. Finish."

"Well, they're going to try to kidnap me," said Vance, comfortably. "I've just been stalling them till you boys got here. I told them it would take me a full month to get a quarter-million in cash together. I needed until October 1, and this is October 1. I got another note to-day. Last warning. I'll show it to you presently."

Johnny Fairfield's expression became even more benign. His bright blue eyes beamed from behind their horn-rimmed spectacles. Oddly, Vance found himself remembering that Johnny had always smiled like that when trouble loomed dark just ahead.

"I'm glad," Johnny said in his mildest voice, "that I didn't miss the boat."

"Listen, you birds," Vance went on. "I'd much rather spend a lot of money having some fun than to give it away to a bunch of thugs. I've already started to spend it, in fact. Working through my lawyer and a private detective agency, I've picked up a lot of information. There are, of course, a few independent kidnapings, amateurish affairs that usually finish up with the kidnapers going to jail. Those can hardly be stopped, in advance, except by making the world know that kidnaping is one of the unhealthiest of occupations."

HE reached in his pocket and took out a slip of paper. Pete Welch watched him in brooding silence, a frown of concentration on his high forehead. Red Ames listened patiently, as was his custom, his sunburned face expressionless. Johnny Fairfield looked more like a deacon than ever as he helped himself to his fourth drink.

"I have learned," Vance went on, studying the list, "that there are four men in New York who practically control organized crime. There are small gangs led by other men, of course, but they don't do big business and they watch the big shots for instructions and for permission to operate. But these four big leaders take off a profit on almost every form of commercialized crime that goes on in New York, if not in the entire East.

"Almost every important job is handled by one of these four. They furnish men to break up strikes, or to protect scab labor—sometimes both at the same time. They collect 'protec-

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tion' money from almost every kind of industry, and practically anything we eat, or wear, costs a little more because of this 'protection tax.' They have so much money that they have corrupted the law to an unbelievable extent.

"And now, I understand, they have all taken part in this new and profitable kidnaping racket. And if it isn't stopped, every man who is even thought to be rich will have to surround himself and his family with paid gunmen—and the kidnapers will probably see to it that the paid gunmen are members of their mobs. It's a lousy business."

"Right," said Red briefly, his sunburned face darkening. "I'd like to get them down in the hot countries. Kill 'em."

"Well," said Vance with a grin, "I think you'll like my idea. I'm going to beat them to the draw. Knowing the four men who control most of the crimes including kidnaping, I sort of thought we might jump first and kidnap them."

"Your bell is cracked!" declared Pete Welch, moodily. "I'm going to take the next train back to the coast."

"Jolly!" said Johnny Fairfield blissfully. "Haven't heard anything so altogether comic since my Great Dane swallowed a dollar watch. You could hear him ticking around the place for—"

"Shut up," Pete snapped peevishly. "You're boiled!"

"I hope to be," Johnny said virtuously, "before the night is two hours older."

"Our first move," Vance proceeded, "will be for me to allow myself to be kidnaped, because I have a great yen to collect, as our first prize, the bird who wants to collect me. Through him I intend to get the rest. I'll lay out my whole plan of campaign to you, but first I want to know who's with me. We're likely to go to jail if we make a mistake, because it's all illegal as hell. We may get hurt badly, because our friends, the gangsters, play marbles for keeps. But there's a chance we might be able to pull the four corners out of organized crime, and I think it's worth while."

"Why don't the police handle it?" asked Johnny.

"Can't make their charges stick in court, even when the judges know the prisoners to be guilty. Too smart lawyers, too good alibis, too much money. Now, who's playing along with me?"

"Me!" boomed big Red Ames, his sunburned face all smiles.

"I've been in it from the very first word," declared Johnny.

"Somebody's got to take care of you crackpots," Pete fretted, "so I guess I'm elected, as usual."

"All right," Vance said, contentedly. "Get your legs under the table while I map out our campaign."

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST MOVE.

VANCE MACKLYN was kidnaped at three o'clock on the afternoon of October sixth, exactly six days after the conference in his apartment. During those endless day of waiting, having failed to answer the extortionists' demands for $250,000 in cash, he confined his out-of-doors activity to two daily walks around the iron-grilled enclosure of Gramercy Park. At ten each morning and at three each afternoon he made it his habit to walk alone around the small park, looking neither to right nor to

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left as he made three complete rounds of the park.

On his afternoon walk, then, six days after the meeting a taxicab drew up beside him. Three men leaped from the interior of the cab and dragged him inside. He struggled, but not too violently. The door slammed and the vehicle swung around the park, turned northward on Lexington Avenue and made its way through the busy traffic of the city with Vance Macklyn, bound and gagged, on the floor beneath the feet of the three kidnapers.

As the cab swung around the corner of Lexington, however, three motor cars which had been standing idle on three different side streets, 20th, 21st and Irving Place, suddenly got under way and followed the yellow cab at a respectful distance.

One was a black touring car, of great speed and power. For several blocks northward on Lexington Avenue, Red Ames, at its wheel, kept the cab in sight. At 38th Street he swung aside and permitted a nondescript sedan, with Johnny Fairfield grinning at the wheel, to take the lead. As the cab turned at 59th Street and began to climb the ramp of the Queensboro Bridge, a brown coupé buzzed past Red Ames and Johnny Fairfield, and Pete Welch took his position two hundred yards behind the fleeing cab.

And so that strange procession passed through Long Island City and out into the open country beyond. The pursuing cars lengthened out until the two rearward ones could not see the cab at all, their drivers contenting themselves with keeping the next pursuing car in sight. From time to time the leading car dropped back and the second took its place. When the taxi passed through congested districts, the cars closed in, only to fall back when open roads again opened up. And thus began the first chapter of the greatest mystery of the decade.

RED AMES, his huge form moving through the darkness with the silence of a cat walking on a thick velvet carpet, worked his stealthy way around to the rear of the close-shuttered farmhouse. Behind him, crouched behind the privet hedge, Johnny Fairfield and Pete Welch fingered their automatics and listened anxiously for the first sounds of trouble. Many miles to the eastward, motor cars hummed along a smooth ribbon of concrete, but no sound of their progress came to the ears of those who made ready to attack the isolated farmhouse.

The big flier crept softly to the side of the unpainted house and listened at the nearest shuttered window. In the darkness his face was calm, impassive, like that of a physician who listens at his stethoscope to the beat of a patient's heart. Red Ames had lived too long by violence to become excited at the imminence of one more affray. Now the sound of a voice came through the shutters.

"You've got to give me another week, I tell you," Vance was saying impatiently. "You won't take a check and it takes time to raise a quarter of a million in cash."

"You had more'n a month," came a rasping voice, "and the Big Shot says you got only three more days, then we give you the business, see. Write your letter to some friend and say just what we tell you to say."

Quite calmly Red made his soundless way around to the front of the house. He raised a fist that looked, in the darkness, to be the size of a first baseman's mitt. He hammered thun-

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deringly at the door. Then he shifted his automatic to his left hand and waited.

"Who's there?" snarled a voice from within. Not, Red Ames noted carefully, the same voice he had heard at the window.

"Open, quick!" he replied, roughly. "Got a message from the Big Shot."

He heard quick steps upon the floor within. Then, from the other side of the panel, "Who the hell are you?"

"Do you want this message or not?" Red boomed impatiently.

There was a rasping of a bolt on the inner side of the door. Red's mammoth body became taut. The door opened slightly and a gun appeared in the crack, followed by a face, silhouetted blackly against the bright light within.

With the speed of light Red's two hands swept forward. With the barrel of the automatic he slashed down against the gun wrist of the other. His mighty right hand clamped around the throat of the man at the door. There were but two sounds, a crack like a breaking branch as the gunman's wrist broke, and a slight thud as the falling automatic dropped to the ground in front of the door sill.

No sound came from the strangling man whose breath had been cut off by those fingers of steel. Once again Red's automatic rose. There was a dull thwack as it came down, butt-end first, on the skull of the kidnaper. The man's knees buckled. Gently Red eased him down to the hall floor.

"Neat, I calls it," approved Johnny Fairfield in a whisper as he and Pete came crawling up to the door.

"What's it all about, Jake?" called a rasping voice from within.

Quickly Red put his lips to Johnny's ear. "Stay here till you hear a ruckus," he commanded.

Muttering disappointedly, Johnny waited, restraining the gloomy Pete from shoving his way into the house. It was not in Johnny's nature to stand aside during a fight and he suspected that big Red was stepping on ahead merely to protect him, as he had attempted so often to do during the war.

CALMLY Red marched down the hallway and turned in at the lighted door. There was no hesitation, no finesse, to his entrance. Characteristically, he marched straight to his objective. Vance Macklyn was sitting in a chair, his hands and feet bound. Two men sat across the floor from him, galvanized to unbelieving astonishment at the sight of the man who filled the entire doorway.

"C a r e f u l, Red," Vance said. "They've got guns."

They did have guns, both of them. In a split-second they had grabbed them and their arms were swinging up to level them at the intruder. But Red, despite his bulk, leaped into action that was as catastrophic as a Caribbean hurricane. His left arm encircled the body of the nearest gangster and hurtled him into the body of the other, who was in the act of pulling his trigger. His gun flamed; particles of plaster dusted down from the ceiling.

Johnny and Pete raced in from the hall just in time to see Red's mighty fist crash home against the face of the man with the smoking gun. The fellow fell, his nose oddly askew, his mouth a shapeless smear. Even before he struck the floor, Red's arms were around his companion. Pinioned as in a strait-jacket, the gunman writhed and cursed until Red methodically slapped his face. The sound snapped across the room like a pistol shot and the man fell silent, nursing a bright

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crimson welt on his face that was the exact outline of Red's palm and outstretched fingers.

"Boy," breathed Johnny, "when you slap 'em, they stay slapped!" He hurried over to release Vance. "Pete," he called over his shoulder, "better tie up with the Rollo Boy who is sleeping it off outside the front door."

Vance stood up, rubbing his numbed arms and legs. Red pushed his gangster into a chair, where the man sat watching him with a look of incredulous wonder in his furtive eyes.

"Nice work, Red," Vance said quietly. Johnny found himself thinking how much that was like Vance, who had been Flight Commander in the old outfit. A word or two of thanks from Vance had been like pæans of praise from others. Now Vance walked over to the seated man.

"Who are you working for?" he demanded crisply.

The gangster spat at him. "None of your damned business."

Vance said nothing. He merely looked at Red, whose sunburned face went suddenly hard. The big fellow reached forward and snapped the gangster to his feet. With a quick movement of his right arm, Red twisted the gunman around and backed him against the edge of a kitchen table that stood at one side of the room.

"Tell, punk," Red said, "or I break your back."

The gunman tried to bury his teeth in Red's wrist, but the big hand on his collar tightened until the man's eyes popped in his head. Slowly, implacably, Red pushed the gangster back, back, until Pete Welch, entering, went white waiting for the fearful snap of the gunman's spine.

"Want to talk?" Red asked, easing the pressure for a moment.

The gangster stamped down on Red's instep. Instantly the pressure was renewed. The prisoner's face crimsoned. Purple veins ridged his swarthy forehead. His eyes expanded with fear and agony. Red's face was impassive as his great arms bent the resisting figure.

"About one more inch, I figure it," said Johnny, watching critically.

PETE WELCH'S sensitive fingers were clenched until his nails drew blood in his palms. He held his breath, waiting. Vance Macklyn absently lighted a cigarette. Johnny heard the breath whistle through Vance's lips as a great gust of smoke was inhaled into his lungs.

"Stop!" the gangster screamed. "I'll—I'll tell!"

The back-breaking pressure came to an end, but Red's unyielding arms held the man in that fantastic posture across the edge of the table.

"Everything?" Red asked.

"Yes!" groaned the man.

"Let him up, Red," said Vance. "But if he holds out on us, don't stop. Break him in two next time."

"Listen, feller," panted the gangster, almost collapsed across the table. "I rat and the Big Shot gives me the business before morning, see?"

"If you don't rat," said Vance, squinting through a veil of cigarette smoke, "your back will be broken within three minutes. One way you have a chance to get away. The other, you'll stay here with a broken back, waiting for him."

The gunman shook as if with a malarial chill. His face was white beneath his swarthiness. He licked his lips nervously. Red reached for him.

"It's Snatch Rosen!" he squalled in sudden panic.

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"Ah!" Vance murmured with a gratified smile. "He is number one man on the list my lawyer made out. After this I think we can trust the list." He turned to the terrified gangster. "I'm going to tie you three porch-climbers up and leave you here. Sooner or later they'll wonder where you are and find you."

"Jeez, don't do that, boss!" the man begged, all the fight gone out of him. He was fear-crazed, now, and took no pains to hide it. "Snatch finds me here and he gives me the heat, see? Lemme take it on the lam, buddy, or I get scragged sure."

Vance's eyes met Johnny's in a quick glance of triumph. Johnny was quick to take the cue.

"Leave him here," Johnny suggested, coldly. "He's probably been cheating the electric chair for years, anyway."

"I don't know," said Vance, apparently doubtful. Then, to the shaking gunman, "I'll tell you what I'll do. If you'll carry out my instructions, I'll turn all three of you loose so you can take your car and beat it. More than that, I'll give you a hundred dollars apiece so you can put distance between yourselves and Snatch Rosen. If you refuse, I'll leave you here tied up. If you agree, and double cross me while you're doing it, I won't shoot you, I'll just let the big fellow crack your spine."

"What do you want done, mister?" said the other, eagerly.

"I see you have a phone here. I want you to telephone Snatch Rosen. You're to tell him that I'm afraid of double crossing and that I'll tell him where he can put his hands on my ransom, but I won't tell any one else, even if you kill me. Tell him you think he, if he were here, might get even more than a quarter of a million out of me, but that you can't do a thing with me."

The gangster seemed to shrink within his skin. His eyes flickered around the four sides of the room, then came reluctantly back to the watching Vance.

"Jeez, boss!" he whined. "I can't do that. Doing that, I'm deader'n a haddock, see."

"You win, Johnny," Vance sighed with apparent regret. "Tie them all up."

"Wait a minute!" the man panted. "Listen, you give me half a grand for my getaway and I do it."

"All right," Vance agreed. "Go to the phone. Red, stand close to him. If he double crosses us, don't bother to take him back to the table, just reach out and crack his neck."

The gangster, with trembling hand, reached for the instrument.

"Oke, boss," he said, shakily. "What do you want me to tell the Big Shot?"

CHAPTER III.

THE BIG SHOT.

THE first pink flush of dawn was painting pastel tints upon the Long Island hills when a great limousine, black with chromium trimmings, made its way along the two-rut road which led to the farmhouse.

Those who sat waiting in the living room heard a warning whistle from Pete Welch who, for the past two hours, had been taking his turn as lookout. Wordlessly Vance, Johnny and big Red stepped to their appointed posts, Vance in his chair, Johnny and Red pressed against the wall on each side of the door through which the gangster chief must enter.

In the storeroom behind the kitchen,

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the three captured kidnapers listened to the sound of the approaching car and sweated nervously, knowing that their own fate depended upon the results of the next few minutes.

The glittering limousine came to a halt outside the door. Snatch Rosen, fat, prosperous and, having murdered all the enemies who had really challenged his supremacy, over-confident, permitted a venomous little man to rise from the seat beside him and to dismount first. This was Torpedo Luis, recently graduated from head Tommy man to Rosen's personal bodyguard.

Torpedo Luis, one hand in each pocket of his niftily-cut coat, stood beside the car, his accurate eye surveying the house and the surrounding landscape. The chauffeur, locking his emergency brake, eased out of the front seat. Drawing an automatic from his pocket, he circled the car and stood by the door as Snatch Rosen descended.

The three then marched into the hallway. Instantly Pete Welch appeared from the privet hedge and tiptoed to the door, waiting by the jamb for the first sound of action. Torpedo Luis was the first to enter the living room. His eyes met those of Vance, sitting, apparently bound, in the chair.

"Did you come to let me go?" Vance asked, quickly.

But Torpedo Luis hesitated, the smell of danger strong in his nostrils. He had not expected to find the kidnaped man alone. Snatch Rosen, immediately behind his bodyguard, pushed into the room. The chauffeur, bringing up the rear, was still in the hallway when the entire room exploded with violence.

Big Red Ames took one step out from the wall. His closed fist crashed down on the back of Luis's neck in a rabbit punch which caused the gunman to plunge forward like a falling dummy. Johnny, in a dive like that of a football end stopping a running halfback, pitched into Snatch Rosen's knees, bringing the man down with a breath-taking crash.

At the same moment the chauffeur, in the act of raising his gun, heard racing steps in the hall behind him. He pivoted swiftly, saw Pete Welch aiming an automatic at his stomach. His own gun hand swerved. Vance, who had leaped from his chair at the first instant of action, crashed into him with the full force of his running 185 p o u n d s. The chauffeur slammed against the opposite wall. Pete Welch, arriving full tilt, threw his arms around the chauffeur's body and bore him to the floor. The battle was over. Not one shot had been fired.

"Nifty, what?" Johnny applauded, his automatic digging hard into Rosen's paunchy stomach. "That's what comes of careful rehearsing."

Vance, nursing a bruised shoulder, grinned. Pete Welch produced a huge roll of surgeon's tape from his pocket. Swiftly, efficiently, he bound the wrists and ankles of the three captives while Red, towering over them like a leviathan, collected five automatics, two blackjacks and, from the chauffeur, a razor-sharp stiletto.

Torpedo Luis stirred and attempted to rise, scrambling awkwardly because of his taped wrists and ankles. The chauffeur sat with his back against the wall, cursing until Rosen turned his black, hooded eyes full upon him. Instantly the chauffeur fell silent, watching his chief fearfully.

Rosen sat, too, an immobile Buddha, but his face was frozen with hate as he watched the swift, carefully planned movements of his captors. There was

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something very unusual about this, he decided. These four men were not typical hot shots. They looked like—like gentlemen. He began to feel slightly easier in his mind, yet his whole flabby body felt feverish with the rage that pulsed through his veins. But he said no word, even when Pete Welch stepped quickly up to him and pressed one strip of tape across his mouth, two tiny strips across his eyes.

"Johnny," said Vance, quietly, "attend to the boys in the back room. All right, Red, pick up your package and we'll go along."

Snatch Rosen weighed over two hundred pounds, yet Red Ames had no great difficulty in picking him up and carrying him to Vance's big black touring car which waited with its side curtain drawn in the abandoned orchard behind the farmhouse. He placed his burden in the back seat. Vance sat down beside Rosen, his automatic ready to hand. Johnny, having released the three men who had kept watch over the kidnaped Vance, hurried to the nondescript sedan in which he had trailed the taxicab the afternoon before. He waved gayly to Pete Welch, who was climbing into the brown coupé. One after another the three cars bumped down the weed-grown road that led to the main highway.

VANCE'S country house was dark. In the heart of the South Hampton Hills and flanked by Vance's private landing field, it was a long, three-story dwelling of the Tudor type, built by his father before the motor accident in France which had left Vance an orphan.

Driving through the main gate, he pulled up at the service entrance which faced the hangar.

"All right, Red," he said, watching Johnny and Pete drive up in their cars. "Bring him in."

Effortlessly Red Ames carried the ponderous bulk of their prisoner up the stairs, through the service wing and into the living quarters. He marched into the great, high-raftered living room behind Vance, with Johnny and Pete bringing up the rear.

"Some dump!" Johnny said, appreciatively eyeing the rich Oriental rugs and the priceless jades that had been collected by two generations of Macklyns. "Look, Pete. If my eyes haven't gone ga-ga, there, of all things, is a decanter. Let's have just a wee snifter to prime ourself for the mental efforts to come."

At Vance's nod, Red dropped his prisoner upon an over-stuffed davenport. The man lay perfectly still while Vance removed the tiny strips of surgeon's plaster from his eyes and mouth. Then two blackly malignant eyes rolled up from under heavy lids. There was no fear in those eyes, merely cold, deadly hate.

"If you're going to fog me," Snatch Rosen snarled, "go on and do it."

"We may come to that. You led off with your chin, Rosen, when you kidnaped me. Now you're going to know what it feels like. And you aren't going to be alone, either." He turned to Johnny, who had just poured himself a Scotch-and-soda. "Over there on the desk, Johnny, you'll find some paper and a fountain pen. Don't use the monogrammed stuff. You'll find some plain stationery. Bring me some, please."

Pete Welch, with his highball, sat down in a chair on the other side of the room and watched proceedings with a brooding pessimism. These old buddies of his had been helling around

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ever since the war and this was all a great lark to them. But he, who had recovered his sanity after those blood-drenched years after the Armistice, was practical, a business man who knew reality when he saw it. Fooling with men of Rosen's reputation was no job for four amateurs. It wasn't a game at all—at least with Rosen. But now that he, Pete, was in the thing, he was going through with it, chiefly on Johnny's account. Somebody had to take care of Johnny, who had always gotten himself into the most fantastic messes.

"Rosen," Vance was saying, coldly, "you're going to have your mob deliver your three chief rivals to us, Ace Dupont, Hymie Nodine and Big Hennesy. You're to write a letter to whomever is your chief lieutenant in New York. You're to tell him that you've been kidnaped and that he must exchange for you those three men.

"It's only fair to tell you that we're not really going to exchange you at all. We're going to keep you as long as we please. But your men are to kidnap those three, get them quietly down to Florida and to have them, bound and gagged, on the beach at Marathon Key, south of Miami, one week from tomorrow night, at midnight. They are to deliver them to any man, or men, who come to them and give the password 'Kidnap.' I'll dictate as you write."

"I'll see you in hell!" snarled Rosen with such cold vindictiveness that even the ebullient Johnny was momentarily sobered. "I'll pay you off for this job. Tell me how much I got to cough up."

"There's no price for your body, Rosen," said Vance. "But you're going to write that letter."

"Make me!" sneered Rosen.

"I understand," Vance said softly, "that your men, when trying to make one of your victims pay up, sometimes use the old-fashioned method of passing lighted matches across the soles of his bare feet. That seems barbaric to me and I won't do it. But—" He turned to the impassive Red. "But are you familiar, Red, with the wrestling grip known as the toe hold? Good. Let's try it."

WITHOUT a word the big man seized one of Rosen's feet and bent it, slowly, steadily, until perspiration broke out in bright beads on the gangster's thrice-shaven face. Johnny, sipping his highball, looked on with great interest. Pete Welch's sensitive mouth twitched and he stared up at one corner of the ceiling.

Rosen stood the agony for long, ghastly seconds. Then:

"Stop!" he shrieked. "I'll write it!"

"Sit him up," Vance commanded. "Take the tape off his wrists. Here's the pen and the paper."

Rosen took the pen. He hesitated. Then he looked up at Vance, his round face a curious mixture of fear and respect and hate. "Listen, guy, make your ante as high as you want. I'll lay the money on the line. But if I put the snatch on these three guys, they'll turn their mobs loose on mine with their heaters. Long's they don't hook up together, I'm sitting in the driver's seat. But three mobs against mine—hell, they'll run me out of town!"

Johnny chuckled happily. "Vance, with each passing moment," he said, approvingly, "I'm more and more impressed with your plan. How New York will mourn the passing of the worthy Mr. Rosen. Tsk! Tsk! I can hardly stand thinking about all that sorrow!"

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"Red," Vance said, "Rosen doesn't want to write the letter. Twist a little harder this time."

"No! Go away, for God's sake!" cried Rosen, reaching for the paper. "But I give you fair warning, you punks, that some day I'm going to hold your living hearts in my bare hands."

"Address your letter!" Vance snapped impatiently.

Rosen began to write. Having addressed his letter, he looked up in sudden protest. "Listen, what's the idea in making my boys deliver these red-hots all the way down to Florida? Ain't there plenty of places around here, or in the Catskills?"

"Perhaps," Vance agreed, "but with the present epidemic of kidnaping that's going on, I'd prefer to have you four men as far away from New York as I can get you. I happen to own an island outside the territorial limits of the United States, where we'll be able to keep you safe from harm."

"Outside the United States!" echoed the gangster. He made a motion as if to toss the pen away.

Red Ames reached swiftly for his foot and Rosen changed his mind. Following Vance's careful instructions, he began to write.

CHAPTER IV.

CARIBBEAN ISLAND.

VANCE'S big amphibian droned southward through the slanting bars of morning sunlight. Vance and Red Ames sat in the dual-control seats, taking turns at tooling the yacht-like ship through the air. Just behind Vance sat Snatch Rosen, his hands and feet securely bound with adhesive tape. Beside him, Johnny Fairfield dozed at the window, an expression of utter peace on his innocent-appearing face. Behind the prisoner, Pete Welch sat watchful, a big automatic resting in his lap.

Snatch Rosen was feeling somewhat better this morning, despite the fact that every hour was taking him another hundred miles away from the city where he had ruled organized crime for years. After having been held for some twenty-odd hours in the luxurious country house, he had come to the conclusion that while these four strange young men might be, and were, dangerous enough in a fight, it was not in them to murder him in cold blood. This was, from his point of view, an odd conceit. Murder was, to him, a natural and direct means to an end. He earned a gross of something over fifteen millions a year by killing, when necessary or desirable, punks who got in his way. The very cornerstone of his business depended upon his instant readiness to have a rival rubbed out and his own successful record as the most prosperous operator in the East proved that his way was successful. He regarded it as a weakness in these four captors of his that they probably would not kill if they could possibly avoid it—and even then they might not.

Ace Dupont, Big Hennesy and Hymie Nodine were birds of a different color. For some time Snatch had been considering terminating his agreements with them with the aid of a machine gun. They had been muscling into the kidnaping racket lately and four mobs—together with a lot of independents—were too many to operate in a field as ticklish as kidnaping.

It was not, Snatch realized, like bootlegging, where a large portion of the public was willing, even anxious,

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that the trade should be prosperous. Kidnaping was unpopular, especially when the snatch was put upon people who were, in underworld parlance, legitimate. Even Snatch, who had been able to purchase almost complete protection for his other and manifold rackets, found John Law uncomfortably close to his heels whenever a kidnaping deal was on. It was a difficult business, but if he were operating alone, he could make it pay tremendous profits.

At eleven o'clock the passengers in the amphibian saw their first palm tree. At three in the afternoon they had landed for gas at Miami. Snatch Rosen, tucked away in the darkness of the lazarette, felt the cold steel ring of Pete Welch's automatic pressed against his stomach, and he made no sound as airport attendants swarmed around the silent plane.

Johnny Fairfield, taking over the duty of guarding the prisoner when the amphibian again vaulted into the air, was delighted at the uneasiness that appeared in Rosen's eyes when Vance headed southeastward over the Gulf Stream and the land sank slowly behind the tail.

"Too bad you didn't confine your body-snatching to children," he beamed at Rosen. "The worst they could do would be to bite you. Grabbing off grown men is bound to have a snapback, my old onion!"

Rosen's fingers twitched on his knee. He turned his hooded eyes at Johnny and, looking into them, the other saw all the wickedness in the world mirrored in their inky depths. He knew, now, how Rosen had blasted his way upward through the slime of the underworld—the man was utterly without soul, without the tiniest atom of human kindness within him. Unconsciously Johnny moved away from the touch of Rosen's sleeve as if it, even, had been befouled by the rottenness of the man who wore it.

For some two hours the big ship droned over a varicolored ocean, with its miles of sea-grass meadows, its ledges of coral rock, its black pits of unplumbed depths, until presently a dozen tiny dots of islands appeared dead ahead. They expanded as the amphibian approached them. Some, Johnny observed, were merely clumps of mangroves growing out of the sea. Others were large enough for houses, but if any, in that entire chain, was inhabited, Johnny saw no sign of human beings.

Then the wing tilted and Johnny found himself looking down upon a hook-shaped island of considerable size, on the southern end of which was a long, rambling house of two stories, built in the tropic manner.

"Where are we?" asked Snatch Rosen.

"I think," said Johnny, blandly, "this is Africa."

SELF-ESTEEM is the most sensitive of human characteristics. Shatter a man's self-esteem and you have an implacable enemy. The first very serious mistake, and one that was to have far-reaching results, in Vance's campaign against the kidnapers, was made at the very first meal on Hook Island. He refused to permit Snatch Rosen to eat at the same table with those who had captured him.

"For the time being, Snatch," he explained coldly, as the four captors and their prisoner were summoned to dinner by Vance's Bahaman houseboy, "we aren't even going to set a watch over you. You can't get off this island unless you can swim twenty-five miles

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through shark-infested water. And then you'd just be on another island. Even if you were to steal one of our guns and kill us all, you wouldn't gain anything, because you couldn't get away. I've sent all the boats off, so that's out. Just make yourself free of the place and behave yourself."

They entered the big dining room. When Vance's father had built this place in the extreme southern Bahamas as a southern fishing headquarters for himself and his friends, he had spared no expense. The windows on three sides of the room gave the place the appearance of a ship's deck; nothing of land could be seen from the tables, just a limitless expanse of water.

Rosen, following the others, noted with some surprise that a large table had been set with places for four only. To one side a smaller table had been laid with service for one.

"You'll have to eat alone, Rosen," Vance said. "We do not eat with murderers, drug sellers, or kidnapers."

Snatch Rosen's dark face flushed beet-red. Until this moment he had thought well of himself, had regarded himself as one who deserved the respect of others as a successful man in a difficult profession. While he was fully aware that many "legitimate" people did not approve of his activities, the last thing in the world he had expected was contempt. It was a weakness in his armor and the shot struck a vital place. His hooded eyes squinted fury at the four who were seating themselves at the other table.

"So, I'm not good enough to eat with you guys, huh?" he blazed.

"Something like that," Vance shrugged carelessly. "You're in three or four very nasty businesses and all decent men ought to take a bath every time they accidentally touch you."

Like a stone out of a catapult Rosen leaped across those few yar polished floor. Vance pushed himse out of his chair, sidestepped, and drove a clean, straight blow to Snatch's fleshy chin. It had been years since the gangster had fought with his hands. Clumsily he raised his right arm, but he was too late. The blow landed. Rosen's head snapped back and the room wheeled before his eyes.

Red Ames reached out a girder-like arm, grabbed Rosen by the shoulder and held him upright while the strength returned to his shocked muscles.

"Behave yourself," said he with unusual loquacity, "or I'll give you a good going over."

"A little advice, Snatch, old sweetheart," beamed Johnny, "Never start fisticuffs around here. When you feel like starting something, get a gun. And then, as an added precaution, change your mind, throw your gun away and be a good little gangster."

CALMLY the four men turned away from him as if he were of no importance whatever. Snatch's black eyes were murderous as he stared at them from beneath his almost lashless lids. Their contemptuous indifference seemed to shrivel his heart and to rot his bones within him. Slowly he went to his small table and began to eat food that tasted like warm ashes on his tongue.

"This," said Johnny, with a long sigh of contentment, "is just what the old family doctor ordered. Nice big house, good servants, marvelous food and liquor— How did you manage it, Vance?"

"I always have to keep a couple of men here," said Vance, indifferently. "They keep the house in order and do the odd jobs. There's a trading

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schooner comes down from Nassau once a month. On its last trip, just a few days ago, it brought the head houseboy a letter of instructions and plenty of supplies."

"No other boats likely to come along soon?" asked Pete Welch, with a sidelong glance at the listening Rosen.

"None. We're off the main route. But we're well stocked with provisions. We have our own light plant, our electric refrigeration and a pump to raise good water from our artesian well. But if we run out of Johnny's favorite bourbon we can always fly to Nassau, or Havana, or Miami." He glanced at his watch, rose and turned on the radio. "It's just time for the news flashes," he explained.

The last half of a dance tune faded into silence. Then came the announcer's voice from a Miami station:

"Another gang outrage was committed in New York today," said the unctuous voice. "At three o'clock this afternoon there was a battle between two cars on the upper west side, near Central Park West. Two men, said to be members of the notorious Ace Dupont gang, were killed by machine gun fire. Witnesses state that one man was transferred from the victims' car to that of the killers'. It is possible that the affair was another underworld kidnaping and police are attempting to locate Ace Dupont, who has long been known for his racketeering in alcohol, protection and extortion."

"Ah," said Johnny, delightedly. "The worthy Ace appears to have accepted our invitation to join the party and—"

"Sh!" warned Vance. "Here's a weather report."

"The Weather Bureau at Washington," the voice went on, "has issued the following advisory. A tropical disturbance of marked intensity is reported fifty miles east of Port au Spain, Trinidad. It is moving in a northwesterly direction at the rate of fourteen miles an hour. Caution is advised all ships in its course."

"That," said Vance, snapping off the set, "is one complication I had not thought of. Careless."

"What's a tropical disturbance?" Johnny asked.

"A Caribbean hurricane. But we needn't worry yet. It's several hundred miles away and the chances of its striking this particular island are about one in fifty. It is more likely to work its way westward into the Gulf of Mexico."

"What happens if it does hit here?" asked Pete.

"We won't be here to watch it," said Vance, succinctly.

Snatch Rosen brightened. Perhaps, he decided, the breaks weren't all to be bad.

CHAPTER V.

HURRICANE VICTIM.

"I WISH," said Pete Welch, for the dozenth time in that past hour, "that Vance and Red would get back."

Johnny Fairfield, sipping his highball, listened to the rising whine of the wind outside. For six days the tropic hurricane had been wandering around the Caribbean. Now, in the past thirty hours, it had slanted northward across Haiti and, according to the radio weather reports, was due to strike the lower Bahamas within a few hours.

"If they don't get here pretty soon, they can't get here till after the storm. I wish I knew what had delayed them.

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They should have been back before daybreak this morning."

Snatch Rosen, squirming restlessly in his wicker chair across the room, watched them, beady-eyed with hate. For six interminable days he had paced back and forth through the house, had explored every inch of the hundred-acre island, had plumbed the depths of the cave beneath the hill, had exhausted every possible means of escape. And his hatred for his soft-spoken captors had grown and flourished within him until he was almost ready to grab a table knife and to run amuck, cutting and hacking until he had wiped out his score in hot blood.

Yesterday morning he had been hopeful that his chance might come when Vance and Red had taken off in the amphibian and had flown westward toward the Florida keys for the rendezvous with the men who should have three more prisoners for this strangest of kidnaping parties.

But Rosen had decided that he could not escape now, even if he were to kill Johnny and Pete, together with both Negro houseboys. The thing to do, he decided, was to wait. His break would come sooner or later. It always had.

But now there was an additional source of anxiety. Since mid-afternoon the wind had been rising, rising, until its slowly-lifting wail was sawing upon his nerves like a bow upon an overstretched violin string. He did not like that wind, although he had not the slightest conception of what a hurricane might be like. He was not worried about the two men who had flown away. Sincerely he hoped they would die slow, agonized deaths. But he was worried about the plane, knowing that it was the only means of leaving the island until the trading schooner from Nassau touched, more than two weeks hence.

Snatch wondered why Vance and Red were twenty hours late. He knew that his mob must have done their work well. Radio news flashes four days ago had spoken of new gang outrages that Snatch could trace to the successful efforts of his men to kidnap Ace Dupont, Hymie Nodine and Big Hennesy.

A total of five men had been killed in fights that were apparently mysteries to New York police, but perfectly understandable to the listeners on faraway Hook Island. It was clear that the police realized something very strange was happening in the underworld, but if they knew that four—or even one — important racketeer had disappeared, they made no mention of it in their reports.

THE steady whine of the wind now rose to a shriek, then died away slightly, but a new and higher note penetrated to the ears of the three in the living room, and they knew that the storm was perceptibly nearer. Even through the closed windows they could hear the mounting roar of the surf outside, and they remembered uneasily that the last high tide had washed dangerously high on the beach.

A slashing rain squall beat against the windows. It sounded like buckshot being poured on taut canvas. The windows were now a gray curtain of water that was sliding not downward, but to the side, under the steady drive of the wind. Pete Welch rose uneasily and walked to a leeward window, trying to see out into the wind-swept night. Johnny Fairfield poured himself another drink.

Alec, Vance's head houseboy, sud-

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denly burst into the room, the whites of his eyes rolling in excitement.

"Mistuh," he panted. "They's a little boat out in the water, and some lady is yelling!"

Johnny and Pete raced out of the room. They gasped as they stepped into the first blast of the storm-driven rain. It was like the stream from a high-pressure fire hose. Before they had taken three steps down the hill their clothes were plastered wetly to their bodies.

The night was alive with sound. Breakers were booming in upon the beach. The rattle of palm leaves was like hail on a shingle roof. And the wind blew steadily, inexorably, with an eerie howl that caused Johnny's nerves to prickle. And yet, he found time to remember, the full strength of the hurricane would not strike for hours yet.

"Where's that boat?" he panted, seeing the wet white jacket of the houseboy beside him.

Wordlessly the Negro pointed down the hill toward the westerly beach. The three plunged down the slope, almost blinded by the rain that slashed into their faces. And then, just as they reached the beach, the rain ceased. A break appeared in the low scudding clouds and a pale three-quarters moon spread a sickly light over the tumbling surface of the water.

"There!" Johnny cried, pointing. "Fifty yards offshore!"

Now they could all see it, a tragically tiny boat, leaping and yawing in the whitecaps that raced in from the sea. And in its cockpit was a small figure waving a scrap of white fabric. Even as they stared at it they saw its bow plunge beneath a curling roller and when the sea had swished past the boat was no longer there.

"Take my glasses, Pete!" Johnny cried.

"Stay here, you damned fool!" Pete snarled. "I'm a better swimmer than you are!"

But Johnny Fairfield was already dashing through the breakers. He had kicked off his shoes, scarcely conscious of so doing. Some faint inner voice was telling him that he *was* a fool, that he was about to lose his life on this mad, quixotic errand, but his legs carried him on.

A white-crested breaker towered over him. He dived under it and was swimming on and on toward the place where the little boat had gone down. Seas smashed into his face, drove him under, choked him, but somehow he found strength to go on. Spindrift, blown from the tops of the waves by the wind, cut into his face, drove into his nostrils, went into his mouth at every gasping breath, but he went on and on.

"Here!" came a faint voice.

HE swerved to the left. A wave lifted him, slapped him in the face. He treaded water, shaking the salt spray from his eyes. There she was, almost within reaching distance. Two more strokes.

"Put your hand on my shoulder," he gasped.

A small, strong hand reached his shoulder, caught a handful of wet shirting, held on. She was trying to swim, trying to help him fight his way back toward the shore. He could feel a lessening of the drag at regular intervals as she kicked her way along. Time dragged endlessly. It was a personal battle between Johnny and the sea that was trying to drown him. Well, he had had the same kind of battles against the air, and he still lived.

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He remembered the great dog fight over St. Quentin, when Vance and Pete had been in a jam with three Fokker tripes. He and Red had happened along just in time. Good brawl. Couple of times he had thought this would be the landing he wouldn't walk away from. And then the Jerries had vanished and everything had been all right except that Vance and Pete had been embarrassingly grateful. It would be all right now, but the girl would be silly about being rescued. Another dozen strokes. Good girl. Helping. Now another dozen. Pretty tired. Two more. Another.

Then he swam full into two men who were standing waist-deep against the plunging breakers. They seized him, seized the girl, and pulled them both ashore.

"Little Nemo, the boy rescuer!" he managed to grin at Pete.

"Guess she's all right," Pete replied, shakily. "She can stand up."

They forced their way up to the house, bending far over against the screaming blasts of wind. Johnny managed to walk alone. Pete was helping the girl. Oddly, Johnny noticed that she was small, and slim, and he found himself remembering that she had not thrown both arms around his neck in deadly panic.

It was good in the big living room. It was light and dry and, compared to the maelstrom of noise outside, it was quiet and homelike. Snatch Rosen was sitting where they had left him. Not even his eyes appeared to have moved. They were staring at Johnny and at Pete, just as they had been when the boys had left.

"Much—much obliged," said an oddly husky contralto voice at Johnny's shoulder. "I think you—you came just in time."

It was her eyes that Jonny noticed first. They were big and black and not too frightened. Her hair was blacker than her eyes. Even plastered down and awry, as it now was, he could see that there was lots of it and that it was naturally wavy. Her mouth was a little too wide to be exactly beautiful, but Johnny thought it was a fine mouth, brave, and generous and good-humored. Her figure, sharply outlined by her wet and clinging clothes, was slender and boyish and it moved, as she walked to the big wicker chair, with a lithe grace that was lovely to see.

JOHNNY'S eyes suddenly went to Pete, who was standing perfectly still, watching the girl with a queer expression that Johnny had never before seen. He appeared not to realize that Johnny was looking at him, so intent was his gaze as he watched the girl. Johnny's eyebrows lifted quizzically, but he was conscious of a sharp little pain in his own heart.

"Better get some dry duds on," he reminded the girl.

"I'll rest just a minute," she said, tired, but not complaining. "And what'll I wear? My suitcase is gone with the boat."

"Oh, we can dig you up this and that," Johnny said. "Pyjamas and a bathrobe, I guess, until the houseboys dry what you have on. But what you really need now is a drink to warm you up." Going to the decanter, he grinned at her over his shoulder. "Maybe," he said, dryly, "we should remember a convention, too. This is Pete Welch, pride of the Frisco advertising fraternity. I am Johnny Fairfield, a thoroughly dissolute person, known to every bartender from Paris to Tokyo. And over there in the chair

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is one Rosen, who makes his living by kidnaping and such-like. You don't really have to know him."

Rosen's swart face flamed, but he held his peace. The girl laughed, not knowing how much of Johnny's description was truth, how much jest, and she was too tired to care much.

"I'm Ailsa Lawrence," she said, sipping the drink that Johnny brought her. "I own Refuge Cay, a little island to the east of this one. My servants all ran away this afternoon when the land crabs came up to high ground. They knew by that that the hurricane was coming. But they stole the only seaworthy boat I had and made for some larger island, probably Inagua. All that was left was the rowboat with an outboard motor, but I knew I had to get away, too. The storm came up faster than I had expected and the waves began to fill the little boat. I saw the lights in your house and tried to get ashore here. Then the boat sank—and you know the rest."

Once again, while she talked, Johnny glanced at Pete. More than ever, Pete now looked like a successful young executive. He had apparently forgotten that a storm raged outside, that human passions seethed within the big room, that he was engaged upon an undertaking that was as fantastic as a nightmare. He had forgotten everything but the girl who sat before him.

Johnny winced. Never, since he had first known Pete, 'way back in the days of Kelly Field, had he seen Pete become interested in a girl. It had been the prime joke of the outfit; when the rest had gone out with girls, sober, serious Pete had remained behind. And now— Earnestly Johnny turned his mind away from Pete. No time to worry about such things now.

"I'm sorry to say," Pete was explaining, "we have no boats here, either. But we're expecting a big plane from the mainland and—"

"A plane?" the girl echoed, her dark eyes widening. "But it will have to get here soon. In another hour no plane will be able to fly. And only a good pilot could get through now, I'm sure."

"Listen, sister," rasped Snatch Rosen in what he imagined was a charming voice. "You had to leave your house on account the storm was coming. What'll happen to this joint?"

A crease of perplexity appeared between her high arched brows at the sound of his voice, at the phrasing of his sentences. She glanced at Pete, at Johnny. No, they were obviously gentlemen. But suddenly she noticed something very strange. Johnny's white linen suit was closely, wetly, moulded to his body and she could see the unmistakable outline of an automatic in his coat pocket. She put her tumbler down upon a taboret and faced the three men squarely.

"Were you telling me the truth," she asked flatly, "about that man being a kidnaper?"

"Yes," said Johnny, before Pete could speak. He liked the brave way her eyes met his, liked the forthrightness with which she demanded to know the facts. "If you read any New York newspapers, you'll recognize his name. He is Snatch Rosen, king of racketeers, boss of bomb-throwers, double crosser extraordinary and snatcher, of babies, women and unarmed men. We have him as a prisoner here and—"

WITH a curious sliding motion, Snatch came out of his chair. He grabbed up an empty highball glass that stood on a near-by table.

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With a deft downward swing he smashed the edge of the tumbler against the corner of the table. There was a tinkle of falling fragments, but what was left in Snatch's right hand was a ghastly, jagged-edged weapon. He advanced upon Johnny, who made no move to reach for his gun, but merely stepped away from the girl and stood waiting with a queer little half-smile on his scholarly face.

Pete Welch, swinging around, drew his automatic from his shoulder holster. "Get back to that chair, Rosen," he said crisply. "I can shoot you four times while you draw your next breath!"

Snatch's ratty eyes swiveled from Johnny to Pete, then to the girl, who sat transfixed with horror at the unexpectedness of this outbreak. Then, placing the broken glass back on the table, he returned to his chair.

"A thousand apologies, Miss Lawrence," smiled Johnny. "He was just getting his evening's exercise."

The radio, which had been playing jazz from a New York hotel, suddenly announced a news flash. Before Ailsa Lawrence could find her voice, Johnny had stepped to the set and increased the volume.

"According to advices from New York," said the voice of the Miami announcer, "there is quite a mystery developing in the underworld. Four of the most important gangsters in New York appear to have been kidnaped, and the police are at a loss to know what group would dare kidnap men of such wide influence in the underworld."

The girl's wide black eyes turned upon Rosen who, listening, returned her look with such a bold stare that she glanced away in angry confusion.

"The results of these four very important kidnapings," the voice continued, "if kidnapings they were, have been exceedingly interesting. All sorts of rumors have been floating around. For the past three or four nights the number of police characters to be seen around the hot spots of town has been steadily decreasing.

"A number of New York gangsters have gone to Chicago, where the underworld is likewise concerned about the mysterious disappearance of such important gang leaders. One thing has become evident: gangdom does not like a mystery.

"The underworld has taken alarm and has practically suspended activity until the facts are known. It is noteworthy that beyond the disappearance of Snatch Rosen, Ace Dupont, Hymie Nodine and Big Hennesy, there have been no kidnapings reported in New York for six consecutive days. Rackets of every sort have died down for the moment and the police and public, alike, are very grateful."

The radio blared into static-filled jazz. Johnny chuckled. Then, meeting the girl's puzzled eyes, he sobered. Pete's rotund face was a study. He scratched his head and finally blurted:

"You may as well know, Miss Lawrence. We're the ones—Johnny and I and two others who are now away in the plane—who have done this kidnaping. We're expecting three more gangsters to come with the boys in the plane. I'm terribly sorry this is the kind of a mess you had to get into, but we'll send you right back to the mainland in the plane just as soon as it comes."

BUT just as the girl was about to reply, Johnny dashed to the rain-smeared window. Through the eerie howling of the wind, the rattling

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of the palm leaves and the booming of the surf on the beach, his ears had caught a familiar sound, the pulsing drone of the amphibian.

"Whoops!" he shouted. "Here she is now!"

"Take this!" Pete said, shoving his automatic into Ailsa's slim hands. "If Rosen so much as bats an eye while we're gone—"

"Don't be silly," said she spiritedly. "I'm going too. I couldn't be wetter than I am now."

Together the three dashed out into the turbulent night. The amphibian was much closer than the men had imagined, for the noise of her engines had been swept away by the wind until she had almost reached the beach. Her wing lights were slanting down toward the water, her engines popping and spitting spasmodically as she shot in for her landing.

The girl staggered in a blast of wind. Johnny grabbed her slender arm and pulled her along. He liked her being out there with them, liked her not protesting as he pulled her, liked her not reproaching them about Rosen. He was glad that it had been he who had rescued her.

The black silhouette of the amphibian drifted down to the storm-riddled surface. Johnny heard the dull thud of the keel striking the sea, heard a staccato crack of breaking wood that brought his heart to his mouth. The two powerful motors burst into full voice and the ship began to forge toward the beach in a welter of spray.

"A sea hit his wing!" Pete yelled. "Wing strut gone!"

At the edge of the surf the amphibian rose on its fat wheels and waddled awkwardly up the beach. Johnny, surveying her quickly, saw that Pete's guess had been correct. A big wave had wiped off her outrigger pontoon and the long wing strut was hopelessly buckled. She would fly no more until extensive repairs had been made. And without any other means of leaving the island—Johnny hoped that Pete would break the news to Ailsa.

With a tremendous roaring and racing of the engines, the pilot taxied the heavy ship far up the beach, working her into the lee of the hill. Her left wing wabbled and swayed under the tug of the wind. The engines kicked over, stopped. From the glassed-in pilot's cockpit Vance's head appeared.

"Pete!" he yelled. "Get some lines. Got to tie her down."

Pete raced away. The gigantic figure of Red Ames appeared from the hatchway atop the turtle deck. He slid to the ground. Another figure, and another, and still another, rose from the hatchway and dropped to the ground beside him. Johnny, holding tight to Ailsa's hand lest she be blown away, hurried toward the quartet just as Vance's head appeared in the hatchway.

"Hi, kid!" said Red's great voice.

Vance clambered down, took three quick strides toward Johnny. "Who's that with you?" he demanded.

"A little visitor," said he, cheerfully. "Girl. Her boat foundered just off the beach."

"Good Lord!" muttered Vance. "Fine place for a girl! Got to stay here now till the storm passes. Busted wing strut landing. Wouldn't have come out here at all if you hadn't been here. Was out of touch with weather reports on Marathon Key. Was halfway here before altimeter went cockeyed and knew we were flying right into hurricane. Too late, then, to take

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prisoners back and return here for you. Hell of a mess!"

"Jolly, I call it," said Johnny, happily. He was never so cheerful as when things were in what others called a hell of a mess. "Nice clubby little party. All we need is a crooner."

"Go up to house with Red and prisoners," Vance shouted. "Pete and I'll make ship fast. Won't take five minutes."

CHAPTER VI.

MURDER.

JOHNNY and Ailsa Lawrence entered the living room ahead of Red and his three prisoners. Snatch Rosen was sitting where they had left him. His hooded black eyes were fixed upon the doorway and his bejewelled fingers were drumming nervously on the arms of his wicker chair.

Big Hennesy, in the lead, came to a dead stop, his cold gray eyes glaring at Rosen. He was a tremendous man, as big as Red Ames, and was built like a wrestler. Ace Dupont, his squatty figure bending sideways to see what was delaying Hennesy, set patiently, swiftly, to work trying to bite away the surgeon's tape that bound his hairy wrists. With his bowed legs, and his great breadth of shoulders, and the arms which reached almost to his knees, he looked, Johnny thought, like an ape.

Hymie Nodine, fat, asthmatic, needed only a white jacket to look like a prosperous delicatessen man. The only unusual thing about his round face was his eyes, which were jade green, with a queer opacity to them that was oddly inhuman. He pushed impatiently at the apelike Ace Dupont, trying to hurry him into the dry living room, while Red Ames, bringing up the rear, ordered Hennesy to move on.

"So you," Big Hennesy roared at Snatch, "are here waiting for us, you lousy rat!"

Ailsa's dark eyes widened at the sound of that snarling voice. She stared, horrified, at the three new prisoners. Never in her life, she thought, had she seen so many horrible looking men in one room. There was something in that instant of electric silence that caused her heart to turn over within her. But she just stood there, staring at the convulsed face of Big Hennesy.

And then, with a roar, the big man galloped into the room. Snatch Rosen shot out of his chair, grabbed the jagged-edged tumbler which still stood on the table. Straightening up, he met Big Hennesy's charge, his arm outstretched rigidly behind the broken tumbler which projected from his hand like a fistful of glittering knives.

The charging man saw that broken glass just a moment too late. His tightly-taped arms swung up, tried to brush that sharp glass aside, but the momentum of his plunging body carried him along. Snatch's arm darted forward, twisting cruelly as he jabbed his grisly weapon straight into the big man's face. The two men went down together in a flurry of arms and legs. There was one bubbling shriek from Big Hennesy; after that no sound except the banging of arms and legs on the floor.

Johnny Fairfield leaped for them. The room was suddenly filled with men. Ace Dupont, his eyes blazing, raced in, his taped hands like claws as he headed straight for the milling men on the floor. Hymie Nodine trotted in, his tradesman's face contorted with

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fury. Red Ames, his tremendous figure moving with incredible speed, reached them before their hands had reached Johnny, who was pulling Snatch away from the bloody bundle of clothes on the floor.

The girl, horrified, fascinated, unable to turn her eyes away, saw Red Ames grab the two smaller men. His great hands were in their hair. She saw him swing his hands together, heard a horrible *thwuk* as the two gangsters' heads came together with skull-crushing force. They fell like dead men.

She saw Johnny Fairfield clinging with Snatch Rosen, whose face, hands and body were crimson with blood. She saw Red Ames, his face suddenly very frightened, yank Rosen away from Johnny as a grown man pulls a doll away from a baby. He seemed to put no strength into the movement, yet Rosen, spinning like a ballet dancer, hurtled across the room and smashed against the opposite wall.

"Hurt, kid?" Red's big voice boomed.

"No."

THEN Red Ames was turning over the great limp form on the floor. Ailsa's senses reeled as she glimpsed the ghastly thing that had been its face. She covered her eyes with her hands and screamed.

Johnny Fairfield marched over to the girl, who had suddenly ceased to scream and had begun to laugh, wildly, hysterically.

"Stop it," he commanded. "Stop it, I say!"

She couldn't stop, couldn't halt that laughter which shook every atom of her body. Calmly, deliberately, he slapped her face once, twice. She stopped laughing.

"You beast!" she sobbed. "You murdering beast!"

Her face twitched and her lips expanded into a smile that, in another instant, would have been a laugh.

"Stop it!" he said, raising his hand, "or I'll slap you again."

She pulled herself together. She noticed that he was standing directly in front of her so she couldn't see that horrible crimson thing on the floor.

"We're going upstairs now," he told her. "I'll find some of Vance's dry things. Come on."

She stared at him for a long, long moment. Then she followed him without protest.

When Johnny returned to the living room, ten minutes later, Red was explaining things to Vance and Pete, who had come in out of the storm after making their plane as secure as might be against the ever-growing force of the hurricane. The Negro houseboys, their faces ashen, had carried the huge body of Big Hennesy, who would steal, murder and kidnap no more, into some far corner of the house. Now they were cleaning the floor, casting frightened glances at the three prisoners, who sat in surly silence against the east wall.

Johnny Fairfield marched straight to the decanter and poured himself two stiff drinks in quick succession. He shook his head as if to clear it of an evil dream. Then he smiled his old, carefree smile and turned to Vance.

"Large evening just starting, old-timer," he said.

But Vance was not listening. He was looking at the barometer with an anxious expression on his aquiline face.

"I'm a damned fool," he said. "I should have kept the boats here so you could have gotten away at the first

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drop in the glass. I've never seen it so low. Twenty-seven eighty. And the worst hasn't come." He whirled around to Johnny. "How did that girl get here? Some more of your foolishness?"

Pete, who had been listening, came to Johnny's rescue, as always, telling Vance exactly what had happened during those long hours when they were waiting for the amphibian. Vance listened reasonably.

"Good work, kid," he said with his usual brief praise. "But it's a tough break for her she had to land here at a time like this. Sorry we were late. Snatch's men didn't get to Marathon Key on time and when they did get there we had trouble. They wanted Rosen delivered to them before they handed their three prisoners to us. We had a fight. And now what? Did you notice how the tide was rising? When I came in the breakers had come up nearly to the eastern foundations. It doesn't look so good."

A TREMENDOUS gust of wind smote the house, filling the room with noise that made conversation impossible. The three gangsters, aware of an enemy they did not know how to combat, listened to the beating of the rain and shifted uneasily in their chairs.

Vance, walking again to the barometer, studied the ominous message upon its dial, then walked over to the three prisoners.

"I'm going to cut off your surgeon's tape," he told the two new arrivals. "If the house blows down, you'll have as good a chance as we of lasting through the storm. But I warn you, if one of you starts anything more, we'll blow your rotten heads off."

"Yeah?" snarled Ace Dupont, presenting his gorilla arms to Vance's knife. There was a huge bluish lump on his forehead marking the place where his skull had crashed into Nodine's. "Well, lemme tell you, punk, it's you as has done the startin' and it's us as'll do the finishing. You've muscled into a racket you got no business in, see, and—"

"Shut up!" boomed Red Ames, towering over him.

Solemnly Hymie Nodine presented his bandaged wrists to Vance. His jade green eyes stared unwinkingly up at his captor's face. There was something so unspeakably foul in those eyes that Vance fought down a sudden impulse to close them—forever—with his bare fists.

He opened his mouth to speak but closed it quickly when a new and more violent gust struck the house with such force that the entire dwelling quivered. The gust died away, leaving a shrill scream of wind which went on and on until it began to cut into the ears of those in the room like the sharp stab of a surgeon's scalpel.

"Where's the girl, Johnny?" Pete asked anxiously.

Johnny helped himself to another highball. "Up in a guest room," he answered, looking at Pete's strained, solemn countenance. "Only thing I could find for her to wear was a tennis outfit of Vance's."

"She'll be scared up there with all this wind," Pete said nervously. Then, oddly, "I wish I'd rescued her, Johnny."

The other gulped at his drink. It gave him something to do while he decided what to say. After all, Pete was a successful business man with a future, while he, Johnny, was only a hard-drinking wanderer who lived by the generosity of an uncle.

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He didn't have a future, had never particularly wanted to look ahead to the security of a comfortable old age. Better, he had always thought, to take the breaks of life as they came along. Few flyers ever reached the white whiskers age, anyway. But now, thinking about Pete and about the girl upstairs who hadn't tried to drown him when he was rescuing her, Johnny became aware that he had somehow fumbled life very badly, and that he probably would continue to fumble it.

Quickly he poured himself another highball. Listening to the insane shriek of the wind, Johnny decided that his earlier drinks had died on him. In a few minutes he would feel all right again. There would be fun tonight. If the house did not fall down under the blasts of the storm, it would blow sky-high with the explosions of passions and emotions that were seething through it.

Johnny knew the signs of trouble when he saw them. There was always a certain tautness in the air that you noticed just before trouble started, and that tautness was here, right now. In some indefinable way those three gangsters who, but a few minutes ago, had been deadly enemies, had suddenly, wordlessly, become allies. As clearly as if they had talked it over in his presence, Johnny understood that they had agreed to combine for their mutual benefit and that they would presently attempt to capture the house.

CHAPTER VII.

WAR!

JOHNNY suddenly saw six pairs of eyes turn toward the doorway behind him. Following the direction of their concentrated gaze, he saw Ailsa Lawrence entering the room. She was young and slim and boyish looking in Vance's white shirt and tennis slacks, which accentuated the blackness of her hair and eyes and the redness of her lips. For a moment she stood uncertainly in the doorway, halted by that barrage of staring eyes.

"Why, hello, baby!" cried Ace Dupont, his face cracking into a simian grin.

Johnny's fists clenched and he took a single step toward the squatty man who now leaned forward in his wicker chair, his small, hard eyes devouring the white figure that was silhouetted against the dim background of the hall. But you couldn't hit a man—even a kidnaper—for saying hello, even if your gorge rose at the way he said it.

"I'll match you for her, Ace," said Snatch Rosen, calmly.

Pete Welch's somber face flamed. He spun around, his hand closing on the butt of his automatic.

"I've got a good mind to shoot the dirty heart right out of you, Rosen," he snarled.

Swiftly, then, the girl came across the room and stood between Johnny and Pete.

"The wind," she said, "is just too ghastly upstairs. I looked out of a window. The sea has come up until it's nearly at the east wall of the house. I'm—I'm just a little scared."

"So'm I, sister," Johnny grinned at her. "I'm scared to a bright blue twitter."

Vance allowed himself to breathe again. For an instant he had thought that Pete was going to precipitate a battle but, as had happened so often within his memory, Johnny had saved the situation, had broken the tension, with his levity. He walked over to the barometer, stared at it.

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"Red," he said in a low voice, "have a look. I've never seen the glass so low. I think we're in for it."

Red Ames, the top of his crimson head half a foot above Vance's, wrinkled his sunburned forehead and nodded.

"I've been blown 'most to hell," he said, "with the glass higher'n that."

Another tremendous blast of wind slammed against the east wall. There was a sudden drumming sound from somewhere upstairs. The four walls, the floor, even, vibrated to the cadence of that drumming.

"Johnny! Red!" Vance commanded. "See what that is!"

Just as the two raced for the staircase there was a deep boom from outside and the house staggered. That, Johnny knew, would be the first blow of the rising surf against the foundations. Entering the hall and beginning to mount the stairs, the two breasted a seething maelstrom of wind that roared down from above like an invisible Niagara. It came from a doorway that opened into an east room on the second floor.

Panting, they fought their way up to the landing. The room was dark, but through the reflected light from the hall, Johnny saw a chaos within that room. A solid sheet of rain was coming in through a broken window. The storm shutter had been blown away by the screaming tempest. The window itself had lasted but a fraction of a second.

Now furniture was sliding across a watery floor. A rug bellied up and flew across the room, smacking against the opposite wall and hanging there as if glued to the plaster. From the night outside came an indescribable roar that was unlike anything Johnny had ever heard.

They hunched their shoulders and began to fight their way into that storm-swept room. But at that moment there was another fearful gust of wind. The house trembled violently and with a single warning flicker, the lights went out in the hallway, leaving the roaring room in abysmal darkness. Things were crashing and banging outside. The surf pounded against the house, shaking the dwelling with every sea. Johnny's senses reeled as he tried to force himself into that pocket of hell-tossed blackness that was the room. The sound, the force of that wind, was stupefying.

AND then, suddenly, he heard a sound that cut through all that noise. A shot. It was followed by another, then by the faraway sound of a girl's scream.

Instantly Johnny turned away from that door. Together he and big Red went stumbling down those inky stairs, helped from behind by the push of the wind. It was like racing down into the bottom of a coal pit. With each step he expected to hit something, somebody. He turned at the bottom of the stairs and blundered toward the living room.

"Vance!" he shouted. Instinct caused him to step aside as the word left his lips. And that saved his life. A gun exploded within the blackness of the living room and a bullet cracked past his head.

"Johnny!" came an anxious whisper from close at hand. "Where's Red?"

"Here," came a calm bass voice beside Johnny's head.

"Help me with Pete!" said Vance, shakily. "And they've got the girl in there with them. They jumped me when the lights went out. They must have gotten Pete's gun and—"

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"What's the matter with Pete?" asked Johnny, quickly. "Is he hurt?"

"Yes, and I'm afraid—" Vance began.

"It—it isn't anything," said Pete in a queer voice. "Johnny, they've got Ailsa."

"Don't worry, old-timer," said Johnny soothingly. "They can't take her away from here. I'll scout around a little and see if something can't be done."

"Stout feller," said Pete's weak voice. "Take care of yourself."

A slow, cold rage swept over Johnny Fairfield as he turned and groped his way toward the living room door. Pete, the only one in the crowd who hadn't gone into his undertaking in the spirit of joyous adventure, hit and, Johnny thought, badly wounded. Pete had joined simply because his three friends wanted him and because of a youthful promise made nearly fifteen years ago. To the others it was an adventure; Johnny and Red, especially, had counted, and dismissed, the possible cost in advance.

And the girl. Crawling, now, on hands and knees through this thundering darkness, Johnny told himself that the thing was adventure no longer. It was war, just as much war as any he had been in against some foreign nation. War of the underworld against society, with a girl, now, as the helpless pawn. All right, if it was war, all bets were off. He came to a halt, quietly took his automatic from his pocket and began to creep again. Some one would die very soon now.

"Hey, you guys!" came Snatch Rosen's shout, scarcely audible in the terrific noise. "Don't shoot, or you'll hit the broad!"

Johnny's automatic, aimed exactly at the sound of that hated voice, wavered and dropped. He waited, his hands and knees against a floor which had suddenly begun to weave under them. Dimly it occurred to him that the house was breaking up, but somehow even that did not seem important now, so full was his mind of that icy hatred.

"Hey!" Snatch's voice went on. "There's water coming in somewheres. We got things our own way, now. Shoot and if you don't kill the broad, we will, see? Now come in here, one at a time, and drop your roscoes on the table. Make it snappy!"

JOHNNY had begun to creep again, to creep over a floor that had suddenly become an inch deep in tepid water. The carpet was undulating like the waves in a heavy seaway and terrific crashing noises were everywhere. But his mind wasn't upon that. Slowly, a foot at a time, he was crawling toward the blackness from which Snatch's voice had come.

"What do you say?" Snatch called again. Instantly Johnny changed his course slightly and scrambled along under cover of the darkness—and the uproar. "I give you ten to come in with your rods. Then—"

An ear-splitting crash blanked out the rest of his words. Something had carried away on the east side of the house. Something vital. The house was no longer a solid thing; it shook and trembled and cowered under the combined onslaughts of wind and sea.

But Johnny had heard something, a little moan in the darkness just to his left. He inched his way over in that direction.

"All right," came Red's booming voice from behind him. "We're coming in. All right, Vance. Come along, Johnny."

Johnny's heart leaped. That last

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sentence told him Red was camouflaging his absence, that the big fellow was planning a ruse. He inched ahead another foot and another and then became suddenly aware that he was close to a living being. He halted, every sense alert, trying to sort out of that tumult some sound that would identify the person who stood just a few feet from his crouched body. Suddenly he heard it.

"Listen, Snatch," came the harsh voice of the apelike Ace Dupont. "If you're going to scrag 'em, do it, but we gotta get outa here. The joint's falling down." Then, in a snarl, "Hold still, you wildcat, or I'll slap hell outa you."

And Ailsa's voice came from beside Ace Dupont: "You're hurting my arm!"

Johnny's teeth were bared in a mirthless grin as he rose to his feet. His right hand held the automatic pointed directly at that squatty figure that was emerging blackly in the darkness. His left hand was groping for the girl. His fingers found her just as the white fabric of Vance's tennis outfit emerged a slim gray blur behind Ace Dupont.

One quick step to the side. His fingers closed around her arm, around the arm that Dupont was not twisting. She flinched and cried out.

"What the hell—" Ace Dupont snarled.

Johnny dropped to his knees with the sure instinct of a born fighting man. A gun flamed across the space where, a split-second past, his face had been. His own gun rose at an angle, dug deep into Dupont's stomach and barked dully. A high-pitched, inhuman scream cut through the roar of the sound, a quavering shriek that died out in a coughing yell as Dupont's heavy body folded over Johnny's right hand.

THEN Johnny was on his feet, sidestepping the falling body. His left arm swung around Ailsa's waist and he threw his full weight into bearing her to one side, quickly, into the anonymous darkness.

"It's all right," he said into her ear. "It's me, again."

Queer, he thought dully, that even in that inferno of sound, in that furious instant of violence, he should be sharply aware of the fragrance of her hair, of the boyish slimness of her body. The tautness had gone out of her muscles, now. She let him lead her where he willed.

"Hymie!" Snatch squalled. "One of 'em's over this way. Back him up into that corner and give him the business. I'll hold the others over there. Too good to eat with me, are they? For that, I'm going to kill every one of 'em!"

Johnny, retreating with his arm still around Ailsa's waist, marked Snatch's fat figure perfectly, but he didn't dare shoot. If he missed, his bullet would perhaps hit Vance, or Red, or Pete—if Pete still lived.

Nothing to do but to try to circle back toward the hallway. But it wasn't easy to think, with the girl so close to him, with the high tide of violence that was pulsing through his veins, with the deafening roaring and booming of the storm that was implacably tearing the house to pieces over his head. He couldn't think, plan. All he could do was to live from instant to instant, doing the best he could.

His shoulder bumped against the west wall. It trembled and swayed as he leaned against it. Something crashed just to the right and a lump

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of wet plaster struck his arm. There was a taste of salt on his lips. At first he thought it was blood. Tasting it, he decided it was sea water. So the surf had broached the house. It wouldn't be long now before they were facing a more deadly enemy than the gangsters—the hurricane itself. He became aware that Ailsa was trembling. In a protective gesture he hugged her close to him. She did not push herself away.

"Don't worry," he said, his salty lips touching her small ear. "I'll get you out. You're a grand girl not to be scared."

Now her lips were touching his ear and the fragile contact gave him new strength, new courage.

"I *am* scared!" she said, in her husky contralto.

A huge voice boomed through the dark tumult: "We're coming, Johnny!"

A vivid ribbon of flame darted from the place where Snatch Rosen had been, aimed straight toward the sound of Red's voice. Johnny's heart contracted. Nothing must happen to big Red. Pete wounded—perhaps dying—and faithful Red blundering straight into this killers' nest. He spun around, shoved Ailsa back against the wall with both hands.

"Stand here!" he cried.

Then, wheeling, he rocketed through the blackness toward the source of that flaming gunfire. His shoulder struck a yielding body. He heard a gun drop. Now it was hand to hand. He thought he heard Snatch Rosen shouting, but he couldn't tell. The very world seemed to have split wide open in a cataclysmic uproar. No human being could live through this storm, but he was going to send Snatch Rosen ahead of him to hell. Kidnaper of children, women, defenseless men, this gangster had become, in Johnny's reeling mind, symbolic of all the crime in the world. Feverishly he swung upward with his clubbed gun, seeking to batter the man's face to a pulpy mass.

THEY fell over something. They splashed into inches of salty water onto a floor that wouldn't remain still. Great rending noises beat against Johnny's eardrums as he squirmed out from under Snatch's heavy body and tried to straddle his enemy. Other hands were grabbing at his hair, fumbling at his face with clawing fingers. That would be Hymie Nodine, the man with the jade green eyes of a cat.

Wildly Johnny slashed up with his fist, felt his knuckles rake along Nodine's face. Then, turning, he jabbed his elbows down into Rosen's neck. He had lost his gun somewhere, but it didn't seem to matter. In this soul-searing chaos of wind, of noise, of stark passions, nothing mattered but to jab, punch, scratch until the life went out of the rotten snatcher of bodies that was down there beneath his knees.

There wasn't much hurry about it either, so long as he managed to kill him before the ceiling fell and killed every one in the room. It was unbearable to think that the lovely Ailsa should die here, so sweet, so brave, so young she was. But every one had to die now. The imponderable forces of nature had decided to crush the spark of life out of a few tiny bodies and that was all there was to it. But Snatch must die first.

Two thumbs appeared from the darkness behind and clamped down on Johnny's throat with paralyzing force. The screaming blackness was suddenly shot with bright lights, red, blue, yel-

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low. Johnny threw himself backward. His head struck Nodine's stomach. The strangling thumbs lost their hold. He returned to the job of killing Snatch Rosen, who bought and sold human bodies.

He smashed down into Rosen's face again, again and again. Rosen's hand came up, felt across Johnny's face. Rosen's thumb suddenly pronged into Johnny's parted mouth, tried to rip his cheek from his face. Johnny's teeth clamped down on that thumb; he felt them raking the bone.

Now his two hands had Rosen's throat. He was squeezing, squeezing through moments that dragged out to eternity. Something was battering at his head. Battering, battering, until he lost all power to think. The whole world was exploding amid inconceivable noise. The house was falling down and the storm was carrying everything away. Everything, that was, but Snatch Rosen, who was between Johnny's knees and holding his breath longer than any man could if he were ever to breathe again.

The darkness was split by a wedge-shaped segment of incandescent light. Millions of rain drops slanted through that searchlight beam. They dazzled Johnny's eyes. As if from a million miles away he heard Red's big voice.

"Johnny, get up! He's dead!"

Johnny heaved a great sigh of relief. The wind was pushing at him and he was falling from the dead body of the man who had sucked in his last dishonest breath, who had kidnaped his last victim. Falling, Johnny knew a great contentment. Big Red, stalking through the storm with a flashlight, had already stopped Hymie Nodine from beating in his head with that hard something.

Johnny could leave everything to Red, who was invulnerable. He would take care of Ailsa and of Pete. Vance could always look out for himself. It was good to flop tiredly, face down into the water that ran in little wavelets across the floor. Everything was all right now and Johnny knew he could go ahead and die in peace.

LYING on his back, Johnny contrived to open his heavy eyes. Then he groaned and closed them again. He heard himself still groaning, so he stopped, ashamed.

"How you feeling, you old fighting-cock?" That, Johnny decided, was Vance.

"Like hell!" Johnny said. Then, remembering: "How's Ailsa?"

"I'm all right," Ailsa's contralto voice replied. A cool, slim hand stole into his. Strength seemed to flow through those fingers, transfusing itself into his hand, arm and, finally, into his whole body. He lay very still for a few minutes, while his bones and muscles soaked up that flow of strength that was coming from Ailsa's fingers.

"How's Pete?" he asked.

"He's—he's asleep," said Vance, too reassuringly.

Johnny sat up. "You're a damned liar!" he said, fiercely. "He's dead."

"Yes, Johnny, he's dead," Ailsa said, softly. "He died while we were carrying him down here to the cave."

"He didn't suffer," Red's big voice said compassionately. "It was a belly wound. He hardly felt it. Wanted to get his gun and go in after you. Said he always had to look after you, but finally he turned the job over to me."

As if worn out by this unusual speech, Red fell silent. Ailsa's fingers were still around Johnny's hand. He

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squeezed them tightly, not knowing that he was hurting them. So old Pete was dead, having given his life that a few less unknown people might live out their lives in peace, so that the grim specter of kidnaping might be halted from menacing the land. Despite Pete's proverbial pessimism, Johnny wasn't sure that his pal wouldn't have wanted to die that way, standing shoulder to shoulder with his old war buddies, fighting it out with a common enemy. It was a better way to go than most.

"The storm is almost over, Johnny," said Ailsa's voice, close by his ear. "The house is gone, but Vance says the Governor of the Bahamas will have boats searching every island for survivors."

"Where are the gangsters?" Johnny wanted to know.

"They're dead," Vance said, calmly. "A timber from the ceiling fell and killed Hymie Nodine just when Red stopped him from beating your brains out. But, for public consumption, they were all killed by the storm and"—he hesitated a moment—"and their bodies were washed away by the sea. We'll bury Pete here in this cave. He had no relatives.

"He loved us more than any one else in the world. I'll rebuild the house and come down here often, so he won't be lonely."

Johnny rested his back against the stone wall of the cave. Matter-of-factly he put his arm around Ailsa's waist. It seemed as if she had always been sitting there close to him, the fragrance of her hair coming through the salt smell of the sea. Now Johnny's eyes were becoming used to things. Vance was sitting against the opposite wall and Red's huge figure was beside Vance. The two blobs of white there in the darkness would be the houseboys.

There was a faraway hum of wind from the mouth of the cave, but the storm would soon be over if the lull at the center had passed.

IN New York, now, the night would be calm and people would be going about their business giving no thought to the weather. A huge segment of the underworld, however, would be uneasy searching for their four leaders, who would never lead again in the despicable job of stealing people for ransom. Months would elapse before gangdom found new leaders, and by that time the powers for law and order would have taken heart and, perhaps, done things to prevent organized kidnapings from ever occurring again. Well, Johnny thought, the four old-timers from the 199th Pursuit Group had accomplished something worth while—perhaps even worth the price they had paid.

"Johnny," Vance said, slowly, "Pete left a message for you."

"What?"

"He wanted you to take care of Ailsa," Vance said. Instinctively Johnny's tired arm tightened on the slim, trusting body within it. "And I was thinking," Vance went on, "if you can't make much money on that airplane agency in Paris, I could find you a pretty decent job in New York."

"Thanks, Vance," said Johnny, shakily. "But if I changed my address from Henri's Bar to a real office, and if I did a little work now and then, I could make a perfectly scandalous amount."

"Suit yourself," Vance said, carelessly. He rose and walked down the shaft of the cave toward the entrance,

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where the first gray light of dawn was beginning to show through the low-scudding clouds. Big Red followed him and they stood together there, watching the lessening storm.

Johnny, still holding Ailsa tightly within the crook of his left arm, spoke gently, as if he were talking to himself.

"Funny," he said, thoughtfully, "I've never cared much about making money. But I could make it—quite a lot of it. I could get a little apartment on the Avenue Alma and if we got tired of that, I could get a job at the factory, if I had made good in Paris. Then we could live in New York. It would be grand, crossing together on the boat. And I guess, now that Pete is dead, I might be sort of ready to settle down. I hadn't seen him for fifteen years, but you don't have to see old buddies; you can just know they're alive and will be glad to see you when you get together, that's all. I'll miss that."

Tenderly he bent his bandaged head close to hers. She said nothing, just sat very still, listening, holding his fingers tightly in hers.

"I haven't known you long, Ailsa," he said, slowly. "And I'm—I'm—Oh, hell, I'm terrible at making love and asking you to marry me and everything. But—but if we ever get out of here—" His voice trailed to an embarrassed stop and he fidgeted pitiably.

"Are you," Ailsa said softly, "trying to ask me to marry you, Johnny?"

"I knew you had brains," he cried admiringly, "just the minute I saw you."

Presently Vance, standing at the mouth of the cave, turned and looked back. "If you want to come up for air," he drawled, "now would be a good time. The clouds are breaking up and there's going to be a sun in the sky. How about it? Do you care?"

"No," replied Johnny, in a muffled voice.

THE END

High-Stepping Nannies

A LARGE portion of southern Morocco is covered with scrub forests, grown together so thickly that the ground underneath is almost barren. Therefore, the only grazing for the goat herds is in the branches of the trees. The animals have become expert climbers, for the gnarled limbs give them excellent footing. They have regular paths and runways among the branches, and feed on the scant leaves and the ripe yellow fruit of a species of plum tree. The birds have almost all been driven to the rocks, although a few nests are built every year in the trees. The air-minded goats, resenting the presence of the bird eggs, quietly turn them out to smash upon the ground. The men of the desert have begun to kill off the goats, for many a snowy burnoose has been splattered by the descending eggs—and the cleanliness of his clothes is more important to the Riff than any herd of tree-climbing nanny goats!

John Caldwell.

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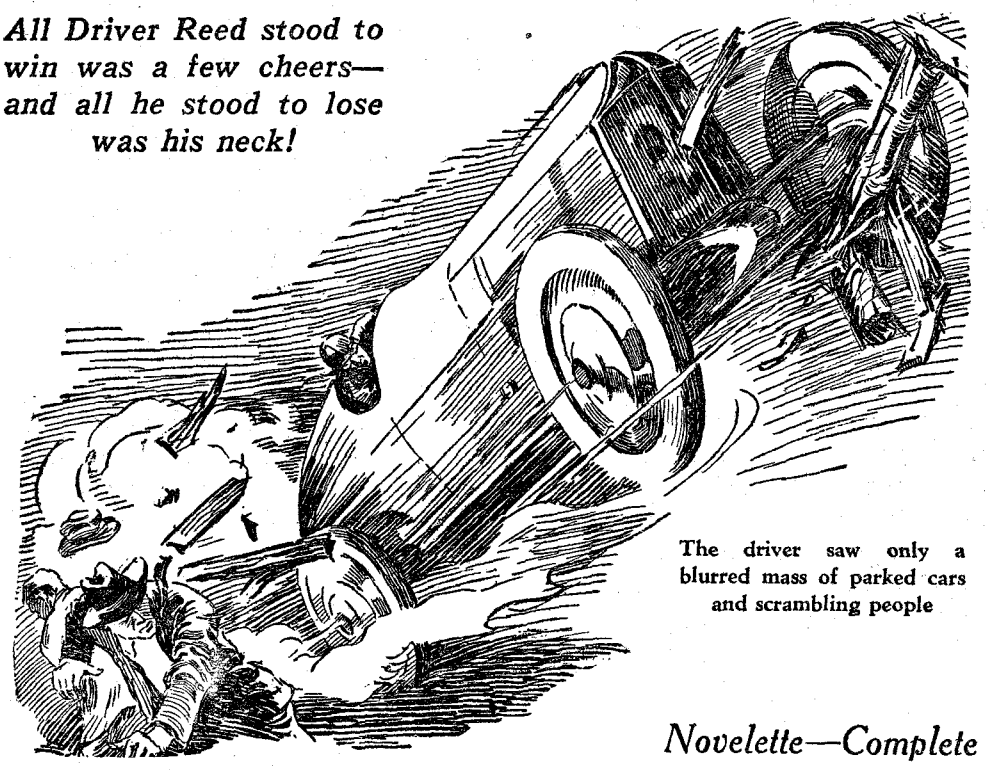
Dirty Driving

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

Author of "On Ice," "No Breaks," etc.

All Driver Reed stood to win was a few cheers—and all he stood to lose was his neck!



The driver saw only a blurred mass of parked cars and scrambling people

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

"FRESH MEAT!"

THROUGH a maze of flying brown dirt, Peetie Reed jammed his hammering, bouncing blue car. His right foot flattened the throttle. With everything he had, he fought a jerking wheel that nearly unsocketed his short, wiry arms.

Somewhere ahead of that blinding curtain, five other cars churned around the first turn of the half-mile track. The diminutive Peetie was last.

His racing career was not yet ten seconds old. But already Peetie knew that this flat-head motor in which he had sunk three hundred and forty dollars was a dud. When you can hit a turn full throttle and stay on the track, there isn't much gun left for straight-away bursts of speed.

With gritting teeth he fought that wheel. The car *was* moving. The hard-packed dirt was now swiftly sliding leftward under his wheels. He caught a glimpse of a looming fence.

Peetie kept his foot down hard. The other fellows had somehow slid around that corner at a faster gait; he wasn't going to lift his foot. But that fence. . . .

His skidding wheels ploughed into the soft dirt, high up on the banked

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course. The car slowed; then the right rear wheel whizzed by the low guard rail. Nothing happened. The loose dirt had saved him. Peetie's throttle was still down hard. The car picked up again, and Peetie headed diagonally across the track to get out of the clogging dust. His jaw was still set.

"Move, blast you!" he grated. "Keep a-coming!"

Coughing and choking, he swabbed a brown film off his goggles and stared ahead. He was in the back stretch.

Under the urge of his impatient right foot, the car snarled down the straightaway. Peetie was moving up.

The curve into the grand stand stretch was coming nearer — fast. Peetie took a strangle hold on his wheel again, and glued his eyes to the broad, slightly banked surface. He swung far over to the right. Then, at the start of the long bend, he put power onto his wheel.

The car sliced across the track toward the infield fence. Peetie felt his rear wheels whipping ahead in the skid. In an instant, he was sliding broadside. The tires screamed, and the car thudded on the track as if it had been dropped from aloft. Only its taut shock absorbers saved the springs. Peetie wrenched his wheel to the right to ease the skid. The car, turning, lunged on abruptly, as its rear wheels spurned the dirt.

The infield fence flew to pieces as the machine slammed off the track.

It leaped up on two wheels, poised to annihilate itself and driver in one wild contortion on the rough sod. It looked like the Big Wind-up.

PEETIE stayed with the car. The grip of his fingers on the wheel couldn't be broken, and the steering column stood the gaff. He caught a glimpse of a blurred mass of parked cars and scrambling people behind the second safety fence. The spectators fled in a wave from Peetie.

But Peetie had gotten control. He wrenched the wheel in time, grazing that inner barrier, and bounced along on the grass. His eyes, slitted behind his goggles, fixed on the infield fence.

Peetie wanted to get back on the track. There was a race going on. And he was in it—still in it!

Peetie headed for the fence. He hit it with his foot planted on the throttle. Again the flimsy barrier whirled in matchwood and splinters around his head — and Peetie was back on the track!

His mount accelerated, and by the time he reached the end of the turn he had picked up enough speed to be skidding again. And he hadn't been lapped yet.

Peetie went after the field then, and the crowd in the grand stand yelled like lost souls. The starter, fingering a white flag that would have put Peetie out of the race caught the eye of the promoter, and didn't flick it.

Peetie got around the next one alive. His throttle foot was as rigid as if paralyzed. The flat-head was revving itself to an early place on the junkpile, but Peetie was merciless. This car had been represented to him as a racing machine. He was last.

As hard as ever, Peetie took the turn guarded by the broken fence. This time, he got past even the second hole in the fence before he drifted up the bank. He slid into the loose-piled dirt, but his right rear wheel slammed against a lump of hard ground under it. The tire blew, and the car rolled.

Peetie ducked in time to save his neck; but his arm on the steering wheel

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doubled up and snapped as the car flung its four wheels to the sky. In another minute, the machine completed the roll and lurched drunkenly onto its shoes.

It was practically stopped. Peetie, flaming mad, jabbed at the throttle. The car thumped into sluggish motion, the iron rim of the blown wheel digging into the dirt. He couldn't hit fifteen miles an hour now.

Cars — winged, sliding cars — went past Peetie and his disabled mount. Their churning wheels flung dirt and gravel at him as if they were bent on burying him.

"I'm not dead yet!" Peetie gritted, with a forlorn glance at the blown tire.

For an instant he hung onto his broken left arm. It hurt like a sore tooth. As the rattling dirt shower from the passing cars subsided, he stared with frank envy after the leading car, a brilliant red job with a red-shirted, dramatic pilot who was juggling his wheel. That would be Rocco Diabolo in the lead, with that fat, bovine fellow called Mad Mack chewing at his heels in a gray, low-cowled bus.

"I wish I *was* dead!" Peetie moaned, sinking low in his seat. Then he sat up again, his gray eyes snapping like spark plugs. "But not till I've shown this cheap gang of outlaw drivers how to make a car wheel!" he amended. "Golly! How that arm tells the world it's broken!"

As he neared the grand stand, he realized that there was a lot of noise going on. He looked up at the ancient stand. It seemed to be almost swaying under some tempestuous outburst of its occupants. And suddenly he realized that they were cheering him. With which realization, Peetie Reed's mercurial spirits leaped higher than the grand stand.

"I guess those people don't feel about me like I do," he muttered. "Maybe they're right and I'm wrong. I never was any judge of a sap."

AS he stopped at the pits, somebody pounded him heartily on the back, and with wide gesticulations encouraged the cheering crowd to continue their noise.

Peetie looked around. The man congratulating him was Mr. Sylvester himself, the promoter of this race meet —big-chested, ruddy-faced H. K. Sylvester, resplendent in a two-button light gray flannel suit, tailored to the limit and topped off by a richly purple necktie.

"'At'sa boy, red-head!" roared H. K., flourishing his natty gray felt. "The crowd loves a game one.—You'll make a great money driver, one o' these days!"

"If I hang together long enough," Peetie Reed retorted with a rather weak grin.

His arm was still giving him hell. H. K. Sylvester glanced down with keen, appraising eyes.

"What's that?" he asked. "Broken wing?"

He cupped his hands and turned toward the judges' stand.

"Tell 'em he's got a broken arm, Jack!" he roared to the man at the loudspeaker. "A broken arm, an' internal injuries.—An' he still wanted to finish the race! Wake 'em up!"

Again he thumped Peetie on the back. "I'll shoot a doctor right over to you, kid," he declared. "This arm's on me. And we'll sling that blue mud turtle into the river and I'll give you a *real* car."

"Me? You mean—you'll back me

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—get me a car with some hop to it?" Peetie Reed faltered incredulously. "After what I did to this one?"

"Sure!" H. K. Sylvester roared. "You got the knack, kid. That red head and those freckles o' yours will take any crowd, but you got to ride without a helmet.—Sure! You and me will show 'em things in the outlaw circuit! Shake!"

Most heartily, he shook Peetie Reed's uninjured right hand while the crowd, stirred up by the loudspeaker, yelled on.

"Take a bow, Red!" the promoter commanded.

Flushed and triumphant, Peetie climbed upon the seat of his car and slung his helmet in the air in delighted acknowledgment of the applause.

"Just give me a car that'll wheel —that's all!" Peetie shouted confidently after H. K. Sylvester as he hurried toward the judges' stand.

Then the redheaded novice realized that the drivers and mechanics in the pit were grinning. It was at him and not with him that they were grinning.

Nobody said anything, except one mechanic, a gaunt, gray-haired fellow with one eye, which was focused intently upon him.

"Fresh meat!" said the man in a cavernous voice. "Run like hell while you've got a chance, kid! Fresh meat!"

CHAPTER II.

THE BROKEN ROD.

PEETIE REED got his car sooner than he could use it. The machine was his, even before the bandage around his arm was covered by brown powder from the swirling dust of the track.

During the early part of the week, at this small Connecticut fair, the trotters had held sway. But for the last two days the roar of motors and the smell of hot oil were the lure for the crowds. The nags were back in their stables; the cars had the half mile "bull ring" to themselves.

On the day after his catastrophic début he was at the track early. H. K. Sylvester had stood for his surgical bill and his bed and "cakes," waving aside Peetie's gratitude with a lordly hand.

"You'll be spectacular, Peetie," H. K. declared, adjusting his vivid necktie and staring at the grand stand, into which spectators were beginning to trickle.

"Spectacular but sappy," the gaunt old mechanic amended.

In dignified reproof, the immaculate H. K. Sylvester glanced at the one-eyed man in dungarees.

"Sam Gill, here, doesn't see the bright side of things, Peetie," he explained. "But I'll say this: there's not a man alive I'd rather have put a wrench to a fine racing car."

"How do you know what I'd do to a fine racing car?" Sam Gill retorted, turning his contemptuous eye upon the brilliantly painted cars in the pits.

H. K. Sylvester sighed gustily. "With times as they are—" he began sadly.

Peetie Reed left them. Sam Gill's single melancholy eye somehow gave him a chill. He walked across the field to the nearest curve, and planted his cumbersome arm in its bundle of splints on top of the inner rail. Attentively, he watched a few drivers slamming into the turn.

Almost immediately he found himself studying the wheel work of Mad Mack and Rocco Diabolo. Now that Peetie was one of the gang, he could

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better appreciate these two daredevils. Mad Mack was a cool, plump, middle-aged man whose jaws masticated gum as regularly and automatically as his heart pumped blood. Nothing ever bothered him. But on the track he was tough. He hit every curve phlegmatically and his powerful, beefy forearms forced his car around as if the curve did not exist.

"There's more to it than beef," Peetie Reed told himself. "That lad's got an eye and a feel for the track."

Nothing could have been a better contrast to Mad Mack's cool-headedness than the way in which the so-called Rocco Diabolo, who was no Italian at all, did his cornering. Rocco made every turn a personal matter; and as he swept around, he was fighting a dramatic duel with his car, with momentum, with the white fence and with anything on wheels that was anywhere near him.

His long, thin body bent tensely over the wheel, big white teeth gleaming between narrowed red lips, goggles glinting like oversize eyes, and red windbreaker blazing, Rocco went into the curve like a knight in armor thundering into mortal combat. He got much more applause than Mad Mack, but his sliding crimson car bounced erratically, as if on the verge of a crack-up; while Mack's gray machine, at the same speed, floated smoothly over the dirt.

"I've got plenty to learn," Peetie Reed told himself. "Blast this arm! I'd like to get going!"

He hustled back to the pits to watch the start of the first race. The stand across the way was almost full.

"Laydees and gen'lemen!" wailed Jack Palmer into the microphone. "You are about to witness—the first of three thrilling an' spectah-hacular heats — in which the best drivers in Amurrica to-day will fight to w-w-win the privilege of competing in the final —the big race of the day—the Connecticut Sweepstakes. For this race the promoter—the famous H. K. Sylvester—has offered a prize of wu-one thou-ousand dollars.—Will the boys step on it for that sum?—Watch them!"

"Would I step on it for one thousand dollars?" muttered Peetie Reed giddily. "Watch me—when I get a chance!"

The party was on. Rocco Diabolo pushed his gleaming teeth around in front of four cars to take the first heat. . . .

AS they were rolling out the entries for the second heat, Sam Gill stepped in front of a green machine.

"Nothing doing on this one," the mechanic said flatly. "Radius rod's broken.—Out of it!"

The driver, a tall, yellow-haired youngster, emitted a roar of protest.

"What's eight laps with a busted rod?" he demanded. "I've seen 'em wheel twenty-five!"

"Car's out—till a new rod's in!" Sam Gill retorted. "Roll her back, Don, and we'll—"

"Blasted killjoy!" the unlucky Don rasped, and beckoned to Sylvester.

The promoter hurried up. "Come on!" he called. "Get that job out on the track!"

"Broken radius rod," Sam Gill stated. "Are you thinking o' sprinkling this lad all over the dirt?—He's willing, but I'm not!—Out!"

He walked toward another driver, who was bawling frantically.

Sylvester did not look at the car. He looked at the driver.

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"You're wheeling on your own," he said.

"I never done nothing else," Don Clarke retorted as Sylvester turned away.

Peetie grinned at the big blond pilot.

"You can't win races unless you start, anyhow," he said.

"And you can't win 'em then — in this outfit," Don Clarke snapped back.

"Meaning what?" Peetie asked.

Don Clarke jerked a thumb toward Sylvester.

"Ask him—he knows," he said succinctly. "I'm just in this for the ride. —Hey, you guys! Roll this green one out!"

They rolled out the car.

The impatient starter waved the five cars on the track into motion. They were around the saucer and blaring past the grand stand, with the green flag snapping before their eyes, before Sam Gill finished his other job in the pits. Sam went up to Sylvester, in the judges' stand, and Peetie trailed along, for a higher view of the race.

"You better get that tow car ready —and the ambulance, too," the grizzled mechanic said curtly to the promoter. "Clarke's job ain't the kind of bus that will last long on this knobby track with a broken radius."

H. K. winked reassuringly at Peetie Reed.

"We have with us to-day, in person, Old Man Gloom!" he said above the roar of the racing cars, and patted Sam Gill on his back. "You'd think to hear him—"

"There he goes!" Sam Gill interrupted, without raising his voice. "Over the bank—and he nearly took that guy in the Fronty with him."

Peetie Reed whirled, as the grand stand roared with excitement. There was a thick smudge of brown dust in the air, at the start of the long turn into the home stretch. Four cars were now swung out on the curve, but Don Clarke's green bus was not among them. Then the dust cloud raised slowly, and he saw the gap in the outer fence.

"That was a quick one!" Peetie gasped.

H. K. SYLVESTER shouted orders to men in the pits. The starter grabbed for his yellow caution flag, and warned the roaring cars to hold their places. Tow car and ambulance, clinging to the infield fence, got under way.

"Too bad he didn't crack yesterday; it would ha' filled the stand to-day!" Sam Gill said caustically.

"Well, you got to take some risks," the red-haired novice argued. "There's a thousand bucks up, isn't there?"

Sam Gill laughed. It was like the grating of a file.

"Sure, there's one thousand dollars up," he said. "There always is.—Only it's always the same thousand." He raised a blackened finger to the promoter. "Why not give a kid a break, H. K.—just for once in your cold-blooded life?" he asked.

H. K. Sylvester cleared his throat. "I'm not trying to pull something dishonest, Sam," he said reproachfully. "Of course, I was going to tell Peetie about that."

With a hand on Peetie's shoulder, he nodded toward the grandstand.

"How do you suppose I could afford to offer a thousand prize money on a gate like that?" he asked. "Well, I do it. Any man entering his own car, like you did yesterday, has a fair shot at it. But these regulars, like Mack and Rocco and Don Clarke and the others,

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all race on a salary basis. I supply the cars, the mechanics, and everything else. They can't lose.—So naturally, they can't win the grand prize, either. Fair, isn't it?"

Sam Gill grinned sarcastically. "But he don't pay the funeral expenses," he put in.

Peetie gulped, seeing that thousand bucks fade. Then he recovered.

"It sounds fair enough to me," he said defiantly to the gaunt mechanic. "I suppose this is a business, not a charity?"

"Right!" Sam Gill retorted. "Or would you say racket? Now, H. K., tell how you save the lives—some of 'em, anyhow—of your drivers."

"You put me in the wrong, right from the flag, Sam," H. K. said, though without wrath.

In dignified silence he adjusted his tie; then he looked the old mechanic and the young novice full in the face.

"The men of my racing stable will tackle any bull ring—I mean track—anywhere. I can't have them killing themselves off in the rough going, as they surely would. So I arrange that certain men shall win on certain days. In other words, I provide a thrilling, but not bloody, spectacle for the people in the stands; a spectacle replete with—"

"—and so forth," broke in Sam Gill, irreverently. "The point being kid, that we fake the races.—Get it?—All you stand to win here is a few cheers and all you stand to lose is your neck. Fresh meat, kid! I'm giving you a straight tip to beat it back to the garage."

"I'm not going back!" Peetie Reed flared. "I'm figuring I c'n learn about slamming a car round a track—and that's all I want here. If I lose my neck, you c'n have the embalming job. You'd go big as an undertaker, I'll say that!"

Silently, Sam Gill got up to look across at the broken fence.

H. K. Sylvester roared approval.

"Spirit!" he shouted, and again he thumped Peetie's still bristling back. "Spirit! That's what we need! You're a crowd puller, Peetie!"

"Speaking of undertakers," Sam Gill said grimly, "that ambulance is headin' straight out of the fair grounds. Sometimes, this slidin' over the bank is bad for the health."

The tow car was coming back. The green car lay out of sight.

"Don ain't conscious," the driver of the tow car reported to Sylvester. "Maybe a cracked skull, the doc says, an' plenty wrong inside.—Car ain't bad. Sam Gill, here, can fix it."

H. K. Sylvester swung around on Peetie Reed. His keen gray eyes studied the face of the young man.

"How about it, kid?" he said softly. "Do you want that job, when you can drive it?"

"Sure, I want it!" Peetie declared stoutly. "That is, I don't want to crowd out Clarke; but if he's—if he's through—green's my favorite color!"

Sam Gill snorted.

"I guess he's a natural—only I don't mean what you do," he snapped at H. K. Sylvester. "I'll fix up the job for him, but he'll have to supply his own name plate for the lid."

CHAPTER III.

DUE TO WIN.

IT wasn't until Peetie Reed saw Sam Gill operate on the crashed green car that he understood why H. K. Sylvester kept the grouchy old mechanic on his string. Sam Gill stayed

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behind at a bench in a big garage while the racing crews made the jump to the next dirt track. And Peetie lingered with him for a couple of days. Sam tore down the green wreck with swift, silent efficiency. He stripped it, soup to nuts; not a part got past him without the sharpest scrutiny on the workbench; and he kept a high-powered microscope handy to reinforce his single eye against possible flaws in steering knuckles and other critical parts.

He was like a surgeon, working rapidly on a ravaged human body. And he did a better job than the surgeons who tackled Don Clarke; for though Don came through, his days in the bull ring were over. When Sam Gill, on the other hand, assembled his job, it was ready to wheel.

"There you are, kid; all set to be cracked up again," he said to the red-headed Peetie. "Unless some o' these other track-jumpers beat you to it, you c'n try looping it. How's the wing coming on?"

"Great!" said Peetie Reed, grinning broadly. "My car!—One swell guy, H. K. Sylvester!"

"So I've heard," said Sam Gill sourly. "I wouldn't trust him not to swipe fire in hell, myself."

"A fine guy you are—working for him, and knocking him behind his back!"

Gill's good eye glinted beneath his shaggy brow.

"I've told him all I could think of—to his face!" he said calmly.

"Why don't you quit, if you don't like him?" Peetie asked curiously.

Sam Gill looked hard at him.

"I'm just sticking around to attend your funeral," he said succinctly. "I got a silk hat I ain't had a chance to wear in twenty years."

Peetie Reed chuckled.

"It'll be back in style by the time you take it out o' the box for me!" he retorted. "I c'n drive—I know I can.—My father could drive. He was a road-racing man, back in the old days. I'll race the wheels off some o' the best of 'em, before my number's up."

Sam Gill snorted and turned away.

It was a dreary long wait, and it included a lot of hard work for his keep, before Peetie Reed was given a shot at driving. As well as his arm would permit, he worked as helper to the mechanics; he repaired holes and picked up glass on the tracks; he checked spares and ran errands. But at last the day came when Peetie climbed into the green car, and Mad Mack fitted his plump figure into his gray one. Peetie had his orders—to keep thirty feet ahead of Mack.

"If you see any fences coming, turn your wheel," Mack said, woodenly. "If they still keep coming, get your knob down out of trouble. That's all there is to it."

His jaws worked forty even strokes on his gum before he added:

"Except if a guy tries to pass you, swing wide on him so he's got to drop back or figure on taking the fence along with him."

Peetie grinned, for he had never seen Mack pull anything raw.

The lessons weren't long ones or hard ones, for Peetie had his other work to do. He fed the dirt to Mack and Rocco and a couple of others; and then, following them, he took theirs—and tried to like it.

Within a week, he was piloting in races—with strict orders from H. K. not to pass anything. But even when he followed the leaders around, holding fourth or fifth place in the swirling dust clouds, the grandstands sometimes noticed him. Usually it was a

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good-natured razzing that he got; but his bare red head was never unnoticed, and many a racing fan yelled implor-ingly to Red to step on it.

"You've got a crowd-catching personality—just like I said," H. K. said, complacently. "Now, you take Mack there—*he* could tear off a lap in twenty-five flat, and they'd hardly notice that he was wheeling."

"Mack's good," Peetie Reed declared.

"Sure; as long as I'm here to tell him what to do," the ruddy-faced promoter agreed.

He smiled condescendingly.

AS the hard-bitten throttle punchers swung westward through the country, playing small fairs and dates at outlaw half-milers, H. K. Sylvester's thousand attracted the attention of many an ambitious young rider. But none of them got within two hundred feet of the checkered flag that meant cash. Either Rocco came flashing down the straightaway, with his car swaying and reeling, or Mad Mack came boring through as steadily as a truck driver heading for home.

The outsiders just didn't have any luck. And of course they didn't know quite what to make of it all.

There were plenty of Three A drivers who would not have scorned a purse of a thousand, but to enter the outlaw fray meant complications with the A. A. A.; besides which, the pilots with tickets reckoned shrewdly that it would take more than driving to pick up the prize money, with four of Sylvester's own men on the track. And H. K.'s thousand, always blazoned on the billboards, and safely deposited with the editor of a newspaper or the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce or some other stakeholder well known to the community, invariably left town with H. K.

"How about it?" Peetie demanded of Sam Gill one day. "Is Mack really good, or is it the way he looks?"

"The best in the outlaw dirt—that's Mack," returned the old mechanic. "He is, and he looks it."

"Then why doesn't he head for Ascot or Indianapolis, where the big money is?"

Sam Gill snorted. "He's the biggest frog in his pond. He ain't interested in the size of other ponds, kid, even if there's damned little money in his own.—How much you drawing down from H. K.?"

Peetie was staggered by this abrupt change of topic.

"Uh— You can't expect H. K. to teach me to drive *and* pay me!" he said hotly.

Sam Gill grunted. "A generous man, H. K.! He throws money away—through the receiving teller's window."

"Pick up your wrench and drop the hammer," Peetie retorted. "H. K.'s going to pay me soon. And he's going to give me a shot at winning the Hartsbury County Fair—the one we hit Friday and Saturday.—Anyhow, we've been running into thin crowds. So pipe down on that, will you?"

Sam Gill said nothing further.

"Friday I win," Peetie repeated. "Friday! Even if it is a faked race, it's good practice. And I'm getting tired of inhaling dirt from everything on the ring. I could take some of these guys in a straight race, right now."

The mechanic shook his head sadly.

"You're losing confidence in yourself fast," Sam Gill told him sardonically. "Soon you won't have any more crust than Hitler or Mussolini or H. K. Sylvester."

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"Friday!" Peetie said once more. "Tune up the old motor so she'll walk and talk, will you, Sam?"

"I'll put a bumper on your job for you," Sam Gill replied morosely. "And it won't be to hit the finish line with, either."

FRIDAY came and found H. K. Sylvester and his stable at the Hartsbury Fair. But H. K.'s usual jovial good nature was a trifle thinned as he looked across the track to the handful of people in the grand stand, just before the start of the races.

"We played this one last year," Sam Gill said. "Looks like they'd about sized us up, don't it?"

The promoter showed his teeth in what was meant to be a smile.

"Nobody ever sized up H. K. Sylvester yet," he said. "I'll have that grand stand full to-morrow. We were too mild last year. I'll see that they get some thrills, this time."

He strode among his drivers, exhorting them to put some steam into their racing. There were no local entries to swell the list.

"Barrel into those turns!" he urged. "Give 'em a throb—stand 'em on their seats! D'ye think this is a panorama?"

"They won't think so, boss—not when I get wheeling!" Peetie Reed promised eagerly. "And maybe they'll come to-morrow, to see the battle for the thousand."

But H. K. hurried on without a word

The other drivers, who for several weeks had been waiting for the ghost to walk the track, were not so easily persuaded to show some speed. Rocco Diabolo, who had been cultivating an Italian accent, was openly rebellious.

"You think better keel me off—cheaper than pay me off—hey?" he rasped with gestures sweepingly protesting. "Well, boss—you're all seeck in the head!"

He nodded vehemently, and abandoned his accent in the interests of emphasis.

"In other words—duck soup!" he added.

His thin, dark face wrinkled up in a menacing scowl.

Despite H. K.'s exhortations, the heats preceding the "big" race of the day went off as tamely as a baby parade. Peetie Reed, all set to boil around the track, found himself pulling away to a big lead over four of his sullen teammates. Nothing is worse than a one-sided race. He did his best for H. K. by skidding his mount high up on the bank in the last lap and throwing a cloud of dust into the air.

But even then he had plenty of time to straighten out and blare down the stretch, an easy winner.

The crowd, though small, was not without a voice. It expressed its opinion of the meet by means of the raspberry, the Bronx cheer and other sarcastic comments.

"Take 'em out an' put in taxi drivers!" yelled one youth, who wanted blood for his eighty-five cents.

"Let us do the racing!" bawled another, who had a girl beside him.

The spectacle put on by H. K. Sylvester was rapidly reaching a point where it might be laughed off the track.

"Mack and I will give 'em a little tabasco in this final, H. K.," Peetie promised. "I get the pole, but I'll let Mack beat me to the first turn. Then I'll go after him and slide past him, near the end of the race. Right?"

H. K. Sylvester looked at the eager

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youth with a strange intensity. Then he scowled at the grand stand.

"Right!" he said, and turned away.

CHAPTER IV.

PEETIE BUCKS A CROSS.

SIX cars pulled out on the track for the "big" race of the day. The spectators had exhausted their comments; they hoped against hope for a little excitement. The roaring exhausts, the blue, acrid fumes, the brilliant colors of the cars, the rushing about of mechanics, and the immobility of the waiting pilots all combined to stir them.

Through the turmoil of the line-up Sylvester strode up to Mad Mack's gray machine and bent low to the driver's ear.

"Plans have been changed, Mack," he murmured. "You're to win this race—not Peetie. Understand?"

Mack nodded his big head. "I win, not Peetie."

"He'll give you the lead on the first turn, and chase you," Sylvester explained. "Get that?"

"I take him—first turn."

Mack nodded again. There was nothing hard to remember about that.

"I've told Peetie to press you. If you mess this up and let him get by, Mack, you and me are through. Get that! You win, or we're washed up."

Mack opened his light blue eyes in bovine surprise at this thrust.

"Why should I let him get by me?" he asked. "I win, don't I?"

"You got it!" H. K. said crisply, and turned around to speak to Peetie Reed. Though Peetie was not ten feet from Mack, the roar of the warming motors made the conversation strictly private.

"Mack understands," H. K. said to the impatient young pilot, and patted him on the back. "You win, Peetie. You're passed on the first turn; you challenge most of the way; and you take the lead again, near the end of the race. Don't miss—and good luck, kid!"

"Don't worry about me!" Peetie retorted.

H. K. Sylvester turned a peculiarly thin-lipped smile on him, retreated to the side of the track and fondled his necktie. Then, almost as the starter got the cars rolling, he darted to Rocco's crimson bus.

"Mack wins—and you're second," he said. "Mack takes the lead at the first turn. You pass the kid and press Mack near the end of the race.—Second. Right?"

Rocco scowled sulkily.

"Because if it isn't right," the huge promoter said softly, "just climb out o' that car, you monkey-faced son of a wrench, and I'll boot you through the front gate myself."

"Second," Rocco Diabolo snapped. "Second.—Okay."

"That's a good boy!" H. K. applauded. "Just for being a nice lad, Rocco, I'll let you win the thousand dollar race to-morrow, and maybe I'll kick through with a few bucks in cash money."

The starter cursed the six machines into movement. In three rows of two cars each, they slowly circled the track for the flying start. H. K. Sylvester, retreating to the edge of the pits, found Sam Gill's eye upon him.

"What was all that chatter about?" the mechanic demanded, straightening up beside the car he was working on.

"Just changing the strategy," Sylvester replied smoothly. "Mack wins, with Rocco second. Afraid the kid's

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too nervous to set a fast pace. The kid can win next time."

"Huh!" muttered Sam Gill.

He laid down his plug wrench and stood on the frame of the car to watch the start.

AS the starter gave the six machines the green flag, they surged ahead. Peetie and Mack shot along side by side, with Rocco's brilliant crimson machine pressing them with dramatic closeness. Rocco kept weaving this way and that, as if fighting for a chance to break through. Peetie, who had the post position, hugged the infield side of the track as they approached the first turn. Mack slammed on around the turn, and cut in ahead of Peetie's green machine. Mack was leading. Rocco, still circus riding, simulated a desperate effort to follow Mack past Peetie's green car. But Peetie blared on, his radiator almost riding Mack's tail, ignoring the histrionic Rocco.

"Blast this make-believe stuff!" Peetie muttered, ducking low to dodge Mack's flying dust.

Mack, taking the backstretch in a smooth surge of power, slammed thunderously into the next curve. His pace kept Peetie's foot hard on his own throttle and his arms juggling the bucking wheel.

"I'm due to pass him—but if the race was straight I couldn't do it!" Peetie told himself.

To Peetie, Rocco seemed to be acting harder than usual. It was not on the schedule, as Peetie knew it, for Rocco to pass; but he certainly was making it look like a race. Peetie fought hard to keep his place, and grinned joyously as he got an angry flash of teeth from Rocco. Good experience—even if it was faked.

Peetie became conscious as he went tearing past the pits that Sam Gill, standing motionless on a car, was watching the race intently. It wasn't often that the crabbed old mech wasted much time as a spectator. Over the track a cloud of blinding dust gathered—a thick brown veil that kept the riders pawing at their goggles.

The time had come for Peetie to take Mack in his roaring gray speedster. Mack, as inscrutable as an iron figure welded into his car, gave no sign that he was ready to drop. The pace was as hot as ever, despite the dust.

Blasting past the grand stand for the nineteenth lap, Peetie barreled into the turn. Mack was close to the infield fence, but at that pace his slide would carry him out almost half the width of the track. Drawing it a bit fine to avoid the loose dust higher on the bank, Peetie slammed his skittering car down the middle of the turn in a fast, wide swing. He gave it all he had. Fixed or not, this was a race!

Mack's car came skidding up the bank. His spinning rear wheels were scant inches away from Peetie's front ones when his tires gripped the dirt again. Half blinded in the blast of dirt and pebbles, Peetie surged on, drawing level with the leader.

Mack glanced for an instant across the dust-filled gap between him and Peetie. Then, stiff as a mechanical man, he put his big right foot down. His car ground ahead, crawling past Peetie, inch by inch, while every instant his wheels threatened to hook. Mack was driving in the groove—the best course on the track for a speeding car to follow. Peetie was bouncing and weaving on, farther up the bank, wheeling as fast but driving a longer distance.

Inevitably, Mack pulled on—two

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feet—three feet—four feet. His flying rear wheels crept alongside Peetie's front tires as the cars blared out into the backstretch. Perplexed and angry, Peetie realized that he had lost his challenge for the lead.

AND then, as the cars zoomed down the short backstretch, Peetie discovered something else. While he had been tangling with Mack, Rocco, behind them both, had crept inside him, close to the infield fence. Now Rocco followed Mack, his front spring shackles almost level with Mack's cone-shaped gray tail. Peetie was out in the cold.

For an instant Mack looked around again at Peetie. His eyes, behind their goggles, seemed to glint like steel ball bearings.

On the other side of the grand stand, the small crowd was going wild. They were on their seats now, at the sight of that compact jam out of which would shoot a winner, and they were shrieking for blood.

In the pits, Sam Gill, still on his perch, had taken his eye off the backstretch to peer at H. K. Sylvester. Sylvester was regarding the grand stand with cold calculation, listening to the wild yelling that would mean a big crowd to-morrow.

To the three pilots roaring down the straightaway came the moment for a touch of the handbrake, a last instant checking of cars for the shock of changing headlong forward speed into a curving course. Two hands jerked out to the brake levers—two hands only.

"Here we go—somewhere!" Peetie Reed whispered. With both hands on the wheel, he tore ahead of the two slowing cars in the last few feet of the straightaway. He turned his wheel with tensed arms and straining shoulders, jamming his nose toward the infield fence. Then with everything he had he fought the rocketing car's rear wheels as he slid perilously up the bank.

Theoretically, a driver might have hit the curve that fast and just gotten around. But the breaks of the day were not with Peetie Reed. His right rear wheel, strained to the limit by the skid, suddenly collapsed. His car spun instantly, a full turn. Before the cars behind crashed into it, Peetie's desperate wrench on the wheel sent it careering high on the bank.

It rolled once on the track, then smashed head first into the guard rail and plunged over the bank. The left front wheel hooked a tree. Peetie went hurtling over the grass between a couple of other trees, and lay still.

Mack beat Rocco to the finish line by a scant length.

H. K. Sylvester glanced at the cars and up at the roaring grand stand; and surreptitiously at Sam Gill, who was riding out on the tow car.

"Mack first—Rocco second," H. K. muttered. "Correct! If Peetie thought he was supposed to win, he's just been dreaming things—that's all."

CHAPTER V.

PEETIE BLOWS.

THE lights were on in the hospital ward when Peetie Reed came to life again. Sam Gill was sitting on his bed.

"You been in a race, too?" Peetie muttered.

Stiffly, Sam Gill lifted a bandaged right hand to his face. His one eye peered out of a mass of bandages.

"It was no race," said Sam Gill

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gruffly. "Broken nose—for trying to half kill H. K. on sheer suspicion. He's tough—I only marked him. Slated to win, weren't you?"

Peetie Reed nodded.

"So was Mack—and Rocco was due in second," said the sardonic old mechanic. "Just a little misunderstanding—so you'd do a spectacular crash and fill the grand stand to-morrow. Believe it?"

Peetie suddenly remembered that last lap—and Sylvester's peculiar, thin-lipped smile.

"I guess I do," he muttered, pulling himself up on one elbow and thinking hard. "Both Mack and Rocco were wheeling to beat me." He scowled. "So H. K. pulled that on me, hey?"

He craned his neck at the bottom of the bed.

"What have the docs got down for me on the chart?"

"Shock—and possible concussion."

Peetie Reed's face flushed to a color approximately that of his hair. He sat up, not without a groan.

"Shock! And in bed for it! What the—! What you doing here?"

Sam Gill's gray eyes raked him.

"D'ye think I came here to bring you posies? Listen; I'm washed up with H. K."

Peetie Reed shoved his feet over the edge of the bed.

"I'm not," he said tersely. "What do they do with a man's clothes when—?"

Sam Gill pushed him onto his back.

"Listen, kid," he said. "You're the kind of sucker that always breaks his neck taking down the prize money—for somebody else. How about giving me a chance to coin money out o' you?"

Peetie stared. "Spill it while I'm helpless," he commanded.

"That flat-head—the blue one you originally crashed yourself into H. K.'s claws with—that car's mine."

"Keep it!" Peetie snorted. "I sold it for thirty bucks. It couldn't stay on the same block with a hearse."

"It looks bad.—But that week we had no dates I put a new motor in it," Sam Gill said. "It'll be here in the morning on a truck." His eye was cold. "You're sucker enough to wheel anything—and cars are scarce," he said. "How about it?"

"A car!" Peetie muttered. "Well, maybe you're right."

Sam Gill leaned toward him again.

"H. K.'s out to clean up to-morrow—thanks to that sensational crack-up of yours," he said. "People in town are talking about it. After the race, H. K. put out a display down on Main Street, in the window of the *Bulletin*. It's one thousand dollars—notes—ones, fives, tens and twenties, scattered all over a green cloth. Just by way of advertising what the guy who wins to-morrow will get for his trouble."

"Or won't get."

"This time, the winner might get it—if he was you," Sam Gill said. "Ken Hendricks, editor of the *Bulletin,* is holding that grand. He's a square guy, and an old racing fan. He wouldn't put that cash into anybody's hand but the winner—especially if I tipped him to the game."

Peetie stared at the old mech, goggle-eyed.

"Are you smart!"

"Are you fast?" Sam Gill retorted. "You got just one advantage, kid. Nobody, from H. K. down to the program boys, thinks you can do anything but roll cars over the bank. Except me."

"And except me, too," Peetie Reed retorted. "I *can* make 'em wheel.—I

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know it. My father was a star at road stuff. It runs in the family."

"Lots of diseases do," the old mechanic said mournfully, standing up. "They'll give you your clothes in the morning. Now get a good night's sleep. You'll probably be too shaky to-morrow to wheel a baby carriage, anyhow."

WHEN Sam Gill dragged his broken nose to the hospital, early next morning, Peetie Reed was waiting for him at the reception desk.

With a grin, Peetie stretched out a short, wiry arm that was as steady as a steel bar.

"Shock, hell!" he said. "I was knocked out—that's all!"

"Prob'ly saved your life by landing on your head," the bandaged mechanic muttered.

He bought Peetie out of the hospital's antiseptic but very businesslike clutches.—H. K. had shown neither personal nor monetary interest in his injured driver.—And in silence Peetie and Sam trudged up Main Street toward the garage where Peetie's old blue car had been delivered during the night.

Near the center of town, Sam Gill pulled Peetie to a halt.

"Look over there at the *Bulletin* office," he said, pointing to a crowd milling around a window.

Two stalwart special policemen in gray uniforms were standing at either end of the big plate glass display.

"That's H. K. Sylvester's thousand bucks lying in state," said Sam.

A worried frown passed over Peetie's freckled face.

"They ought to have more'n two cops guarding my money," he said.

Sam Gill's gray eyes stabbed at him.

"Sort of cocky, aren't you?" he growled. "Look closer, kid, and you'll see somebody in the crowd that's likely to take your money away from you."

Peetie looked, and made out next to one of the armed guardians the attenuated figure of Rocco Diabolo. Rocco's dark, intense eyes were fixed immovably upon the scattered bills behind the glass.

Peetie chuckled.

"Rocco doesn't like this risking his neck getting H. K.'s cash back into H. K.'s pocket once a week," he said. "Rocco hasn't seen fifty for a month."

"None of us have—except H. K.," Sam Gill answered, still studying Rocco Diabolo with keen attention.

Suddenly Rocco dragged his eyes off the money and pushed his way precipitately into the office of the *Bulletin*.

"Come on," said Pete impatiently. "I want to see the car."

Sam Gill resumed his stride.

"We've got to outfox H. K.," he said. "He's a wily bird—and as straight as a valve spring."

Peetie stopped dead. His was the face of a stricken man.

"Suppose he rejects my entry!" he said.

Sam Gill gave vent to a raucous sound intended to be laughter.

"Reject it!" he said. "He'll love you—and spread the news all over town with a loudspeaker on a truck. 'Kid driver comes back for more—out for blood—win or crash!' That's the line that'll fill stands and infield black and solid with cash customers."

"I don't care how many people watch me walk away with Sylvester's dough," Peetie retorted.

Sam Gill lowered his bandaged head and stared at his trudging feet. "We've got to out-fox him," he mut-

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tered. "You've got to sing low. It's only an outside chance."

PEETIE got a royal reception at the track that morning. H. K. Sylvester pounded his rigid back with the heartiest of hands; he assured Peetie of his overwhelming delight that he had come through his crack-up unhurt, and he received with regret, mingled with unselfish pleasure, the news that Peetie had his own car.

Though his face got redder than Rocco Diabolo's car, Peetie managed to keep still.

"But where'd you get a car?" H. K. demanded of his erstwhile handy man, a trifle suspiciously.

"It's my old one," Peetie replied. "A fellow fixed it up for me."

"Oh!" said H. K., putting his hand up to his mouth to suppress a grin. "That one!"

His hand came down to fondle his latest in neckties, a vermilion scream. The effect was a trifle marred by the burly promoter's black eye — product of the hard knuckles of old Sam Gill.

"Peetie," H. K. said, looking at his watch. "I'm going to give you a real break. In the next few hours, I'm going to flood this town with the news of your comeback. I'll use handbills, loudspeakers and sandwich men. I'll make you famous!—Don't thank me!"

Peetie didn't. H. K. was racing toward the nearest telephone. Peetie suffered from his suppressed and boiling language; also because H. K. hadn't betrayed the slightest fear for his thousand.

"Well, at least I didn't give it away that Sam Gill's back of me," Peetie growled.

Briskly he headed for his geared-up blue speedster. The blue car didn't look like much, for Sam Gill hadn't wasted any paint on it; moreover the smash work had been done more with the idea of unscrambling the twisted car than beautifying it. But under that scarred hood there was a four-cylinder, flat-head motor that would percolate. Peetie proved that unostentatiously, without opening up for more than a few hundred yards in a lap. He was following Sam Gill's orders to out-fox H. K.

Mad Mack, strolling aimlessly about the pits, turned a cold face toward Peetie. And Peetie, knowing Mack's blind obedience to H. K., didn't try to make the ox-like driver believe that his master and not Peetie had caused that jam on the turn when three cars almost locked horns.

The morning passed, and then, in thickening groups, the crowd came through the turnstiles. While H. K. Sylvester's smile broadened into a positive beam, the grand stand filled up and overflowed into the infield. It was the biggest gate that had ever been attracted to one of H. K.'s race meets, for his publicity was vivid rather than truthful. The story had spread that a grudge fight was on, with whirring cars for weapons, and between a reckless, redheaded kid and the two men the kid believed had conspired to crowd him off the track.

With the spectators came Sam Gill, strangely unreal in a brown suit instead of blue dungarees, but no happier looking than usual. He leaned his bandaged head over the fence and stared mournfully into the pits.

During the qualifying heats, which were run off without fireworks, H. K. was everywhere; patting drivers, slapping mechanics on the back, smiling on spectators and participants alike, and now and then pausing to make sure that his vermilion tie was properly

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in place. Only his black eye sounded a slightly discordant note in that symphony of good will and good sportsmanship.

For Sam Gill alone he had no smile.

A privileged and not unobservant spectator, Ken Hendricks, editor of the *Bulletin,* a squat man with a seamed face and knobby jaw, lingered in the pits. He had a bulky packet in his breast pocket.

THE time for the Hartsbury Grand Prize race came. As on the previous day, Mad Mack, Rocco Diabolo and Peetie Reed had each won his heat.

Mack and Rocco were ordered out in the first row, with Mack on the post. Peetie's blue mount was pushed into the second row.

As Peetie was about to squeeze into the narrow bucket seat, H. K. overdid the good fellowship a trifle. He placed his arm around Peetie's shoulder and beamed down into his face.

"Good luck, Peetie.—I do hope you win!" he declared genially.

The redheaded driver blew up at that. He wrenched himself free of H. K.'s friendly arm and swung around to confront the promoter.

"There's something I've got to tell you, you double-crossing crook!" he burst out. "I'm no sucker in this race! There's a motor—a *good* motor under that hood! Sam Gill has tuned it for me, and I'm set to rip you loose from your money. Maybe it's not outfoxing you, but I'm giving you warning! Watch your thousand!"

H. K.'s smile never cracked, though it grew a trifle more full of teeth. Hendricks was listening, and so were Mack and Rocco.

"Get into the seat of your junkheap special, kid. You're just a stooge in this act," H. K. Sylvester said with a contemptuous eye on the blue car. "Mack or Rocco—either of 'em could lap you in his sleep if he wanted to open up. I'll make it two thousand if you win—two thousand. Do you hear that, Mr. Hendricks?"

"And what do I get if I win?" Rocco demanded.

"Only one thousand; but Mr. Hendricks's got it right in his pocket for you, Rocco," Sylvester assured him, smiling blandly at this drama.

Rocco whirled on the newspaper man.

"You heard that!" he said. "I'm out to cop the cash this time—not on his orders in a faked race, but on speed! One thousand—right!"

The bland benevolence faded out of H. K. Sylvester's face at that declaration. His lips twisted up into a snarl, but he controlled himself.

"Winner takes it," said Hendricks curtly.

"All right, Rocco," H. K. murmured. "Of course I think Mack's going to trim the trousers off both you lads.—First, Mack! You get me? I think you're coming in first!"

"First, huh?" repeated Mack woodenly. "Right, boss. First!"

Despite his imperturbable countenance, Mack's gaze turned with a certain calculation first upon the spectacular and then the reckless Rocco. His jaws continued their steady, punishing champing upon his wad of gum.

Already, Rocco's dark eyes were knifing at Mack, scornfully raking the bovine, supremely confident pilot.

Neither man, however, spared more than a contemptuous flicking glance at Peetie beside his shabby blue wreck.

"Let's all have a race," said Peetie, sarcastically, and jammed a helmet over his diminutive red head.

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This time Peetie didn't have to play to the stand. He was his own man.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BLUE FLAG.

THOUGH there were six pilots on the track, only three counted. But when three men are grimly set to get the checkered flag first on a narrow, rough dirt track the result is a race.

As the six cars blasted into the first turn, Peetie Reed understood what he was up against. The two cars ahead of him — Mack inside, Rocco outside — went roaring down the stretch and into the bend in the brown dirt as if they were welded together. Side by side. Mack deliberately held his car square in the middle of the track. Rocco, shooting recklessly into the turn, found himself jamming his car down a narrowing funnel, Mack's car on one side and the curving fence on the other.

Desperately, Rocco strained at his hand brake and checked his car. He dropped in behind Mack, and then jerked his machine down the bank toward the infield fence. But Mack had instantly cut his own speed so that he could force his sliding car down alongside the inner fence. His machine-like steadiness blocked the hole before either Rocco or Peetie could plunge into it.

"H. K.'s orders!" Peetie muttered, as pebbles and dirt from the churning wheels ahead deluged and blinded him.

He remembered a brief, private talk that the promoter had had with Mack before the start. The starter and the other officials were the promoter's men; and Peetie realized that he was up against more than drivers.

On they went — the three leading cars, gray, crimson and blue — three enemies setting a pace that left the others trailing. Peetie, with Sam Gill's counsel to wait for a break still fresh in his ears, held to third. Thirty-nine more curves—thirty-nine more chances to gain a place or break a neck—were coming up.

Rocco, after blaring into that trap, was catching his breath as they streaked around into the backstretch. Mack, with one unhurried turn of his head, saw the gap widening behind him and coolly eased his headlong speed a trifle.

"Don't wait for me," Peetie muttered, jamming down his foot. "I'm a-coming!"

He surged up on Rocco. The crimson clad pilot, snarling over his shoulder, gunned his mount. Mack opened up, too, and again they slammed, bouncing and jarring, up the rough bank.

Rocco got his nerve again. He went after Mack, past the roaring grand stand, with a wild spurt of speed; then, with lightning-like agility, he braked hard and knifed for the infield fence. But Mack, missing nothing, beat him to it.

A storm of dirt from Mack's skidding wheels, a choking cloud of blue smoke from his exhaust, the loom of the gray car dead ahead, told Rocco that there was no thoroughfare.

"Good driving!" gasped Peetie.

He was learning fast—learning that both of these men ahead had a turn of reserve speed up their sleeves. They had never showed that much before.

Deliberately, he let his blue car drop back. Then, with a hasty rub at his goggles as the next turn came flying toward him, he shoved his foot down again. The blue car surged suddenly ahead. With humped shoulders and

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bent arms, he barreled into that curve. Close by the infield fence, he hit it.

IT was a desperate experiment. His machine, shuddering and bouncing, went drifting up the bank almost as it had on his first experience in driving. He hit the loose dirt, and hurled it into the air in a blinding cloud.

For an instant or two, he ran on inches away from the white fence that seemed to curve inexorably faster than he could force his car to follow. Slackened pace saved him, and he clawed down the bank again, nearer to the fence.

Whirling dirt was thick around his head; he realized that despite his wide slide he had come up on Mack and Rocco.

"Acceleration!" he muttered. "This bus is good! Sam's tuned it—tuned it to the limit."

But there was a wild, uncertain pilot and a stone-walling, blocking driver ahead, and the rules of the track had been dropped behind. Peetie needed more than acceleration to win that race.

He dropped lower into his seat, nursing his hard-pressed motor, but holding his car within three hundred feet of the dueling leaders. Rocco was driving like a devil unleashed—fighting to get by on straightaway and curve, but always beaten by the steady, iron control of Mack, and by those center-of-the-track plunges into the curves. Never could Rocco whip his bus toward the infield fence in time to get through the hole.

It was not good racing. Mack would have been flagged off, disqualified, on any sanctioned track. But it was supremely good driving.

Lap after lap hurtled by. Peetie Reed closed up. He could always jam his radiator onto Rocco's tail. But beyond that point, two utterly lawless drivers on a narrow track raised a barrier of flying steel.

Peetie kept coming, however. With raw and smarting throat, plugged nostrils, and constantly filmed goggles, he took the dirt which the gray and the crimson cars hurled back at him. He made out all he could of the fight. Plan after plan flitted through his head, but he made no move.

Twice, one of H. K.'s slower cars, lapped by the pace of the three leaders, tried to block him as Mack was blocking Rocco. But each time Peetie, with gritting teeth, swung alongside. On stretch or curve he held place, inches away from the whirring tires of the blocking car, silently challenging the other man to try his luck in a crash. And each time the other man faded, pulling over or dropping back.

Riding Rocco's weaving, uncertain tail, Peetie bored on, awaiting a break or a chance that never came. That terrible, ruthless battle between the stalwart Mack and the whip-like Rocco went on; lap after lap, mile after mile.

SUDDENLY, as the three cars, like one flashing, vari-colored mechanism, swept down the straightaway, Peetie Reed blinked and swabbed his goggles. That momentary flick of blue he had seen was the starter's flag. Last lap!

"I waited for that break, Sam," Peetie murmured. "Now I make my own break!"

As the grand stand blurred past him, Peetie pulled over toward the infield fence. He rode with his whirring wheels tight to the fence. Rocco, just ahead, had caught the flick of the

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blue flag, too. Maddened by the nearness of defeat, Rocco gave his car all the gas she would take. As the curve came up he rode wheel and wheel beside Mack, as on the first lap.

Mack was still on the inside and again, with a quick sidewise backward glance, he headed to hit the curve square in the center of the track. Once more Rocco was on the spot; he must choose as before among three alternatives—dropping back, locking wheels with Mack, or broadsiding into the fence. Blocked!

Rocco, like Mack, had seen Peetie hugging the infield fence. The red-headed kid was waiting for the opening.

Deliberately Peetie cut his pace to keep his car from skidding too far away from the inner fence. Whether or not he could blast his way up into the hole ahead, he was making his play.

With eyes straining through clouded goggles Peetie watched the hunched shoulders and straining arms before him. He gauged the pace. He saw Mack hold his place on the center of the track as rigidly as if his roaring car were on rails. He saw Rocco's arm leap to his hand brake and then, instead of clutching it, leap back to his wheel. He had not braked. All this, in the fraction of a second, Peetie noted.

At that instant, Peetie's foot came down on his accelerator—hard. It was time for him to take a chance.

"Keep a-coming!" he whispered.

CHAPTER VII.

PEETIE MAKES HIS PLAY.

SHOOTING into the turn, Rocco's unchecked crimson car bounced broadside up the bank. Too fast! Uncontrollable at that terrific pace, it skittered toward the fence. The reckless pilot's efforts were useless; the car was no longer a thing running on wheels, it was a hurtling chunk of steel, sweeping sidewise along the track in a brown hurricane of dust.

Peetie's car, spurred so suddenly by his foot, broke from the infield fence and went soaring up the bank after Rocco's. His gait, as his rear wheels lost their grip on the dirt, was just as swift as Rocco's. But unlike Rocco's, his skid had begun near the infield fence; Rocco's had started half the track nearer the outer rail. That was the difference.

Eyes starting in his head, arms fighting the bucking, unruly wheel, Peetie lurched up the incline. The dust was well nigh impenetrable; blindly he was hurtling toward a car that was completely out of control. He risked all he had, in assuming that Rocco could never get away with that broadsiding smash into the turn. Whichever way Rocco was going, it would not be forward.

Then a splintered fragment of white-painted wood crashed down on the blue bonnet of Peetie's car, and bouncing, whizzed past his ear. Almost simultaneously, he caught sight of other bits of wood—remnants of the outer fence. Rocco had hit it.

Shooting through this menacing hail of splinters, Peetie's straining eyes picked up a bit of crimson, almost dead ahead in the dust.—Rocco's machine had hit the fence and guardrail glancingly, and had bounced back onto the track!

With wrenching arms Peetie jammed his car over against the outer fence. No time for brakes now; he must drive clear or crash. He heard his rear hub cap clash against the guardrail; and his car jumped convulsively. He

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stabbed on between the fence and Rocco's looming tail. His arms were tense as coiled steel springs, anticipating swift hell from Rocco's crimson wreck, or from that smack against the fence. But he swept safely past the whirling menace, and neither tire nor wheel quit him. He gunned the car instantly, and shot on into the brown opacity ahead.

Rigidly, he restrained his impulse to dive out of that nightmare of dust and toward the infield fence. Instead, he held his rocking, bouncing car to the center of the track, pressing it to the limit.

The swirling veil thinned; almost cleared. He saw, as he had gambled, that Mack, with Rocco headed surely toward a smash, had cut his speed, to dive down the bank in an effort to plug the hole by the infield fence. And Peetie knew as the gray car was revealed, that his blue bus was wheeling faster than Mack's.

They were bonnet and bonnet now. Mack, in one glance, took in what had happened back there in the dust. He jammed down his foot and sent his gray speedster drifting up the bank in a menacing skid. The same trick—drop or crash!

Peetie jammed on, straight ahead, teeth grinding, eyes forward. A car with rear wheels biting dirt should outspeed one in a slide. If it didn't. . . .

Mack's gray car slashed in just behind the roaring blue. Its right front wheel demolished the falsework of Peetie's streamlined tail. But it was astern.

Peetie's car, bucking and weaving dangerously, bouncing and swaying on the rough curving track, at the limit of control, gained the straightaway. He got his wheels lined up for the burst, and looked around.

Mack was coming fast. Like a master, he had picked up his car and jammed it along the curve with unfailing skill. Not a length behind Peetie!

THE last turn of the race rose up ahead of Peetie. His hands tightened spasmodically on the wheel. All he had to do to win was to swing wide on this stretch, and hit the turn in the center of the track. Then Mack must helplessly eat his dirt. Out-foxed! That would be fair—in this dirty race.

A flaring challenge surged up into Peetie's red head. With a set face, he pulled over toward the infield fence.

"Pass—if you can!" he gritted at Mack, and hit the curve close to the infield fence.

Mack had his chance. For the first time in this race Peetie could see something. He was handing out the dirt; not taking it. And with his eyes sizing up the track, he rocketed into the last turn.

For tense instants, Peetie's wiry arms wrestled with a crazy wheel. He gave his broadsiding bus leeway, but not too much. He fought his snapping rear wheels, surging forward to sling the car into a fatal spin. He fought with aching, straining body and commanding, unfearing brain—his utmost effort! The car, riding perilously on right front and right rear shoes, bounced sullenly back onto four wheels again. Peetie blasted on around that bending stretch of dirt.

On the knife-like edge of possible speed, he blared into the straightaway and lanced down it, past a snapping checkered flag.

Only then, lifting his cramped right foot, did he venture to look around. No one had contested with him that final straight dash past the grand stand.

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Mack's gray car, blazing, lay on its side on the track, half way around the last turn, and Mack was desperately crawling out. In his effort to beat Peetie, he had rolled over.

In another instant, Peetie coasted past Rocco's crimson machine, which, with motor dead, stood inside the shattered infield fence. Rocco was draped limply across the rear wheel, but he straightened up as Peetie drifted by, and he shook his fist across the infield toward Mack.

The iron man had cracked, and with him had cracked H. K. Sylvester's lucrative racket.

BACK in the garage, Sam Gill looked over the blue car while Peetie Reed counted up to two thousand, several times over.

"How did that riot start?" Peetie asked the engrossed mechanic.

"As you got the checkered flag, H. K. tried to call it no race, on account of crack-ups in the last lap," Sam Gill said succinctly. "Hendricks of the *Bulletin* went for him with both fists. Then other people mixed in. It wasn't until H. K. had shelled out your other thousand to Hendricks that it looked like he had a chance to escape lynching.

"Then you got back to the pits, and the crowd forgot H. K. He barely escaped with his neck.—They were all for you, kid."

"Maybe the crowd falls for my red knob and freckles, but why're *you* wasting a good car on me?"

"I want to cash in on you," Sam Gill said harshly. "Fresh meat! I know a sucker when I see one."

Rapidly, Peetie split the wad of bills into two parts, dropped one on the seat of the blue car, and headed for the door. "Applesauce!" he said over his shoulder.

Sam Gill wilted.

"Wait!" he called. "D'you see this eye?" He pointed to the one that wasn't there. "'Way back before the last Vanderbilt Cup Race, on Long Island, I had two of 'em."

"The Vand— My dad was ki— He finished in the ditch in that one," Peetie mumbled.

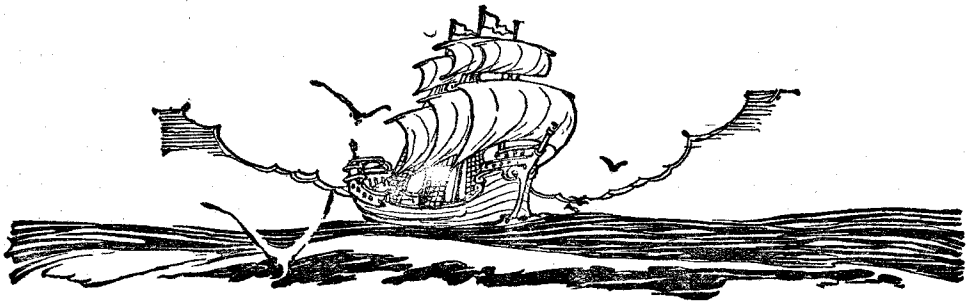
Sam Gill nodded, his hard old face close to the cylinder block of the flat-head.

"I was with Chris Reed—his riding mech—when we cracked a steering knuckle," he growled. "Since I couldn't scare you out o' this game, I was hoping maybe I could drag you away from H. K., and keep you alive until you got sense enough to quit."

Peetie Reed looked intently at the intake manifold, and then grinned suddenly over the motor at the frozen-faced mechanic.

"Suits me, partner!" he said cheerfully. "But I'm sort of slow about getting that kind of sense."

THE END



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The Witch of Silverwood

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

Was she witch or angel, Captain Dakin wondered as he took charge of his prisoner in the Adirondack wilderness

She looked down at Dakin with a smile of triumph

CAPTAIN ADAM DAKIN was not a man to draw back when the gods held the cup of adventure to his lips. A scream had come ringing out of the brightly lighted tavern. It had shivered through the serene night with such a freight of terror that even the big bay which the captain rode had stopped, snorting, with his forelegs braced. A woman's scream, and it had ended suddenly as though a brutal hand had stifled it.

Dakin rubbed thoughtfully the scar of an old saber cut which ran from cheekbone to chin. He hesitated a moment only because of his own precari-

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ous situation. The horse under him and the clothes on his back were all his possessions. If anything happened to them he would be left stranded in what was known to the America of 1848 as the Adirondack Wilderness.

The captain rode up to a hitching post at one corner of the tavern and dismounted. For a wayside inn it was somewhat pretentious. The building stood broadside to the road, with large wooden pillars running along the front from porch to eaves. There was a balcony at the second floor and every window above and below stairs blazed with candlelight.

Strangely, for a place so well lighted, there was no sound or appearance of any human being. Nor did the scream come again. The tiny noises of a summer night murmured steadily. The turnpike highway stretched on to the north in the dim starlight. Dakin shrugged a pair of muscular shoulders under his broadcloth coat and moved toward the front door, keeping to the ground so that his boot heels would not betray him on the boards of the porch.

The door of the main entrance to the tavern stood open. Beyond there was a broad, barren hallway, and stairs. Dakin looked in at an angle and glimpsed a bar through another doorway. Candle flames wavered slightly in a faint stir of air but there was no voice or movement from the interior.

Lately Captain Dakin had been with General Winfield Scott at the storming of Chapultepec and the taking of Mexico City. Before that he had fought Indians. Therefore he was not a man to enter blindly into a place so suspiciously calm. He slipped one hand inside the front of his waistcoat of flowered silk and passed through the doorway with a swift glance to the right and left.

A DOOR slammed above stairs with a sound that rang through the stillness. A big, richly dressed man came rushing down. Dakin stepped to one side. Then the stranger saw him and came to an abrupt halt at the foot of the stairway. Powerful hands became fists and his dark, florid face worked savagely under two fresh-made scratches across the jowls.

"Who the devil are you?" he demanded.

"Capt. Adam Dakin," calmly. "Late of the United States dragoons."

"Well, what are you doing here?"

"I am on my way to Montreal, sir, where, Heaven willing, I shall take ship for Europe to see if I can find a war that will last more than one campaign!"

"Be on your way, then!"

Now Adam Dakin was an officer and a gentleman and he was in the habit of hearing his orders spoken with courtesy.

"You, sir," he said, "may go to the residence of the potentate whose name you recently invoked."

All of five seconds elapsed before the red faced man realized where he was being told to go. Then his neck swelled until it seemed that his satin stock would burst.

He raised an arm. Captain Dakin's wrist moved slightly and the hand which had been hidden in his waistcoat appeared. The shining barrel of a slender duelling pistol pointed directly at the midrift of the man who faced him.

"I will overlook the rudeness," he said, softly. "I see that you are excited, sir."

The big man made a barking sound

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which might have been brief laughter struggling through his anger. The tension of his face relaxed and a new look came into his eyes.

"It may be that the devil has sent you," he remarked, looking Dakin up and down from boots to beaver hat. "Are you pressed for time?"

"Aye," replied the captain, "for my pockets are empty and as I am as honest as a soldier must be in peace time I see no way of eating until I find a friend who lives in Montreal."

"Come into the bar! My name is Jared Henderson."

Then he lifted his voice and roared so that the pewter mugs fairly jumped on their shelf.

"Patch! Patch McGovern! Come out and give us something to drink!"

A door at the end of the bar opened and as evil a face as Dakin had seen north or south of the Rio Grande was thrust into the room. A black patch hung over one eye socket. The other eye had the look of a mean horse. Patch McGovern came and leaned his paunch against the bar and spread out mighty arms which crowded the sleeves of a greasy butternut shirt.

"Aye, Mr. Henderson," he said, with a cavernous grin, "what'll it be for you and the other gent?"

"Hot rum?" suggested the host, and Dakin nodded. "Look you, Captain Dakin, here is Patch McGovern, as pretty a villain as ever stepped out of a story book, and I have two score men besides. But I need another for a few days. One who is like a good steel blade! Now what do you think of that?"

THE normally amiable glance of Adam Dakin became as hard as agate. He did not like McGovern and he had by no means placed this prosperous looking Jared Henderson, in spite of the bunch of heavy gold seals at his fob and the fine cambric shirt which must certainly have come from abroad.

"What can be done with honor that will I do," he said.

"Right enough!" admitted Henderson. He emptied his glass. "There's a woman upstairs. Perhaps you heard her caterwaul when you stopped?"

"I heard a scream," admitted Dakin.

"And came to the rescue?"

"If I saw the woman mishandled I might interfere."

"No one will mishandle that one, I can tell you! Look at my face! We call her the Witch of Silverwood, although she was christened Amy Brent. But I've got her tied now, and muzzled!"

"What has she done?" asked Dakin.

"Enough!" roared Henderson. "I bought a mountain of her brother, John, before he died. For the timber, and wood to make charcoal for my forges. I'm an iron master. Patch, here, is a notary. He witnessed the signature of John Brent. And now the woman harries my men off. She's got a dozen servants under her spell. Let a man of mine lift an ax on that mountain and a musket ball pops into the tree in front of him. And three or four are sick. They think she's put the evil eye on them, or some such nonsense!"

"Where do I come in?" asked the captain, when Henderson paused for breath.

"To guard her! Why, Patch here is the only man I could trust not to let himself be befuddled by her cunning! And he'd do her damage. I can't have that. I might have to explain it sometime."

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McGovern chuckled, and leered, and Dakin reflected calmly that he would like to run the man through.

"You'll be responsible for her night and day," went on Henderson, "and I may say that if you disappeared here no one would have a chance of finding out what had become of you. Do you understand? If you let her take you in you'll never see Montreal! On the other hand there's a thousand dollars in good gold coin for a job well done. I'll have things the way I want 'em in a week."

"For a thousand dollars," replied Dakin, "I would take charge of the Witch of Endor herself! I think, sir, that you have enlisted a man!"

"Then come and help get her out of here," said Henderson, turning away from the bar. "I've had enough of it already. And so has McGovern. It was hard enough to tame her after we got her here. I had him clear the tavern for this affair."

Henderson led the way up the stairs and along an echoing corridor. He stopped before a battered door and inserted a key in the lock, and then he cursed.

"She's stopped the keyhole," he said. "Look out for yourself now! I'm going to break down the door."

The flimsy door shattered under a blow from Henderson's shoulder. He pushed the wreckage aside and paused just inside the doorway.

The figure of a woman in a dark riding cloak was leaning against the brickwork of the fireplace. A candle lay on the floor at her feet. She had been rubbing the cords which bound her hands against the corner of the bricks.

All this Captain Dakin took in at a glance. His gaze came to rest on the strange figure of the woman. For her head, turned toward them, was completely encased in a kind of sack of black bombazeen cloth, drawn tight with a string.

"Do you see?" Henderson was saying. "I leave her bound and hooded like a hawk! She reaches a candle, fills the keyhole with wax, and then goes to work to wear her wrists free!"

THEY rode for an hour or more, Henderson, Dakin and the woman, until they came to a long stone house which sat on a pine studded knoll overlooking Lake Champlain. Jared Henderson rode ahead, leading the way though the silent, lovely night. Then came Dakin and the prisoner, side by side. Henderson had insisted that a rope be tied around the woman's waist and fastened firmly to the captain's saddle.

"You don't know her," he had explained. "She'd shoulder your horse into the ditch and be off at the first chance if you didn't have her tied."

The Witch of Silverwood had not spoken as yet in the hearing of Captain Dakin. She had come out of the tavern at Henderson's command, and mounted, and she had ridden with bowed head but with the firm seat of an accomplished horsewoman. Dakin had seen her hands. They were young. And when the long cloak was swept aside in a breath of wind from the lake he saw that she was slender.

The house of Henderson was the house of a man. There were bridles and guns in the broad hall. The heavy furniture was battered by hard usage and the chamber into which the master of that house led his prisoner was bare of ornamentation.

A huge canopied bed stood out from one wall. There was a chest of drawers, and a long mirror in a gilt frame;

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chairs and a washstand with flowered crockery. Henderson opened the door of a clothes press and looked in. He examined the lock of the door.

"She'll have to eat," said Henderson. Suddenly his face took on a look of something like solemnity. "I've got to untie her, Dakin, but beware! For your own sake as well as mine. It won't go well with you if she escapes."

He drew his knife and laid the edge against the cord that bound the woman's wrists. The cord fell to the floor. Her arms swung forward to her sides but the slim bloodless hands hung helpless as the circulation slowly returned to them. On one finger was a great turquoise, in a rich and ancient setting. The blue of the stone was startling against that white flesh.

Henderson seemed to hesitate at the black, bag-like covering which was over his prisoner's head. Suddenly he reached out and snatched it away.

Never had anything taken Adam Dakin more by surprise than what he saw now. He had expected a vixen; he saw an angel.

A mass of honey colored hair had come unbound. It rippled free on the dark shoulders of the cloak. It framed a pale oval face, with pinched cheeks and dark, pathetic eyes.

The eyes looked directly into his own. They were nearly black with emotion, he saw, and guessed that they would be blue if they were at peace and in the light of day. She lifted her chin and revealed a white throat, rounded, enticing.

"Look at her!" rumbled Henderson. "You would be safer, Captain, if I had put a rattlesnake in your charge! There'll be a man with a shotgun under the windows, night and day. And you are never to go farther away than the hall outside the door. When you go out don't close the door. Given ten minutes she'd be up the chimney of the fireplace and down the eavespouts to the ground! Now I'll send up a meal, and try to get some sleep."

Henderson went out. His heavy footsteps died away along the corridor. Amy Brent moved to a chair and sat down, huddled in her cloak, with her face turned away from her guard.

Captain Dakin began to recover. A witch? Just what did Henderson mean by that? The soldier, who had seen strange things, was willing to grant that the man might believe that this girl had supernatural powers. Or did he mean simply that she turned the heads of men and tricked them?

Henderson might have a grievance, more or less just, but it could not be that this young and innocent looking girl was evil.

Suddenly Dakin realized that he was a soldier. He tried to shake off speculation; it was his business to obey orders.

A tall, bony, manservant with little pig eyes came in, bearing a huge tray. He spread a table and went out without a word. There was cold chicken, ham, bread, wine, little cakes. Dakin placed a chair and spoke to his prisoner.

"Miss Brent," he said, "will you eat?"

The girl stood up. The dark cloak slipped away from her shoulders and fell to the floor. She was revealed in a ruffled evening gown of dark silk. An evening gown and riding boots. She looked down, conscious of the incongruity.

"I was at dinner," she said, in a low sad voice. "They told me my gardener, Humphrey, had been thrown from his horse and taken to McGovern's tavern. I put on boots and a

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cloak. Fool! I might have seen the hand of my enemy in this affair!"

DAKIN remained silent, standing. She came to the table indifferently and sat down. Then she looked up at him out of troubled eyes.

"Will you have supper with me, sir?" she asked. "I cannot blame you in any way for this situation and I have an idea that you are hungry."

Dakin was as hungry as he had ever been in his life. He bowed and drew up a chair.

"I can only say that I am sorry for our situation," he told her, "but I've seen enough of war to take life as it comes."

"Ah, yes!" she murmured, cutting a little sliver of chicken.

He poured the wine and then he ate with the appetite of a man half famished. The girl watched him empty his glass and refill it. She sipped at hers with the hand that wore the turquoise. Suddenly she shivered and glanced at the windows.

"The night air is chilly," she said. "If you please, captain, may I have my cloak?"

Dakin sprang up and crossed to the chair she had occupied near the fireplace. He stooped, recovered the cloak, and placed it about her shoulders. Certainly no man had ever earned a thousand dollars more pleasantly!

"Thank you," said the girl, as he sat down again. She smiled, faintly, sadly. "At least I can drink to your courtesy, Captain Dakin!"

"And to your beauty!"

Their glasses lifted and touched. Her eyes were dark pools. Dakin put his glass down. He would have to watch himself. There was a strange charm about this girl. Perhaps it was her helplessness.

Adam Dakin reached for the salt spoon, in its little cut glass bowl, and missed it by inches. He looked at his hand curiously. It had wielded the best blade in his regiment. He reached again and his body pitched against the edge of the table. He straightened in his chair by a great effort. The girl was laughing at him.

"Try to get up, my bully!" she murmured.

His legs were powerless. He found the edge of the table with his hands and braced himself but it was useless. That white face across the table with its deep, dark, mocking eyes alternately receded and advanced.

"Try to call out for help!" she urged.

When he made his sluggish throat bring forth a sound it was no more than a whisper.

"Jezebel . . . witch . . ."

Her laughter tinkled in the quiet room. She raised the hand with the turquoise ring and touched the setting.

"My witchcraft was in this ring," she told him. "A little powder that I put into your wine when you went to get my cloak! Very soon, my simple soldier, you will fall into a deeper sleep than you have ever known before!"

Dakin realized bitterly that he was slipping from his chair, and could not help himself. His limbs were powerless. He could no longer bring even a whisper from his throat. There was no pain, but he was rapidly being swept into oblivion. His last memory was of the girl standing above him, looking down with a smile of triumph.

CAPTAIN DAKIN was cold and stiff, and the gray of dawn filled the room when he returned to consciousness. He tried to move

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Hands and feet were bound. He twisted and looked down. She had taken the cords from the bed curtains.

There was the table with the remains of their supper. The door was closed. Dakin worked his hands up to a waistcoat pocket and got out a little pearl handled penknife. He lifted it to his teeth.

In five minutes he stood erect, free, but with every muscle creaking.

Rage filled him like a fire. It was bad enough to be defeated by other men in battle, but to be tricked by an angel-faced . . . Henderson had been right! Truly she was more dangerous than a rattlesnake! It was the worst humiliation Captain Adam Dakin had ever known.

He felt for his pistols. They were in the pockets inside his waistcoat. He stepped to a window and looked out. Dawn was unfolding like a rose above the eastern mountains, on the opposite side of the pale lake. On the greensward below a man lay sprawled face downward, with a double barreled shotgun lying near one of his outflung arms.

That was her work! Captain Dakin whirled from the window and started for the door. Then he noticed a little slip of paper on the table, beside the wine bottle, with his name staring up at him in a round, fair hand.

"I have left your pistols in the hope that you and Jared Henderson will kill each other."

That was all. Just a parting remembrance from the honey-haired devil who had made a fool of him. Dakin dashed for the door and flung it open. He stood there, listening, uncertain what he would have to face. Slowly the belief was borne in upon him that the house was empty.

With a hand on a pistol he went downstairs and out into the sweet air of morning. He examined the man on the ground. A lump the size of an egg had risen on the fellow's head, but otherwise he did not appear to be hurt. Dakin turned him over and brought water.

"Who be you?" demanded the sentry, when he groaned his way back to consciousness.

He tried to rise, and sat down again dizzily.

"In the service of Henderson," answered the captain. "What's happened here?"

"I'm sorry, sir!" The man was dazed. He felt of his head. "I remember now! I heard a kind of rustle behind me but afore I could turn they was a million sparks. I guess I was hit hard."

"By a hand as soft as velvet!"

"She's got off, then? I knowed they wasn't no use trying to hold her! She's a witch, that 'un!"

"Where's your master?"

"Why, ain't nobody about?"

Dakin swore.

"Think, man! I've got work to do! Where could Henderson be?"

"Most likely he's took the men and gone to Twin Mountain. If he can sink a shaft and get up a stockade she ain't got men enough to drive him off. Most likely that's it. If he thinks she's safe here he's gone there. Her people won't have no orders."

"Sink a shaft?" echoed Dakin. But he had no time for speculation. "Get my horse, if you're able, or tell me where the stables are."

In a few minutes Captain Dakin was on his horse and he went down from the stone mansion to the highway at a gallop. A length of rope for a prisoner who would not escape again was wound around his waist. The wobbly

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sentry had told him how to reach Twin Mountain and Silverwood, the home of the witch.

DAKIN cantered out of a wooded strip of roadway and found himself looking across a little rolling valley at a mountain with two peaks rising from the same base. There was Twin Mountain, with the morning sun bright upon its dark green loveliness. To the right and toward the shore of the lake he saw chimneys rising from a grove of silver maples.

The stillness was broken by the sharp bark of a rifle. A puff of white smoke drifted away from a stand of pine at the foot of the mountain. Then Dakin noted a long file of men marching on foot, with a knot of horsemen at their head. They had been going toward the mountain but at the shot they broke and took cover.

That must be Henderson's force, gone to take possession of the mountain in the belief that Amy Brent was safe under guard. While Dakin watched she rode out from the pines and exposed herself clearly to view. There was no mistaking her carriage, the cloak flapping in the breeze, the gleaming spot which was her bright hair.

She raised her arm and three more shots came from the pines. She had mustered her people and was again driving Jared Henderson from the timber of Twin Mountain. Dakin touched his horse and they swept down into the valley, where they were concealed from both sides in this strange war.

Captain Dakin had seen the moment for his revenge, and he seized it. His road brought him to high ground again in the neighborhood of Silverwood, which could not have been better to his purpose. He trotted past rambling grounds and gained a little knoll which was between the pines and the house.

There by the pines the girl sat her horse magnificently, indifferent to the chance that Jared Henderson might lose his none too well controlled temper and open fire on her.

Dakin bent low in the saddle and spoke a sharp command into the ear of the bay. They shot forward like a bolt from a crossbow. They thundered down upon the girl before she realized what was menacing her from the direction of her own home.

Dakin leaned far out from the saddle and an arm that was like tempered steel hooked around her waist just as her horse broke into a run. He lifted her clear. He flung her across the saddle in front of him like a sack of meal. Then they swept past the pines. The captain gazed down the long barrel of a squirrel rifle, but he knew that weapon would never be fired while there was a chance of injuring Amy Brent.

The horse she had ridden came clattering behind. Dakin turned in a long arc and made for the road along which he had come to Silverwood. But now a couple of horsemen had shot out from the maples, and they seemed to be well mounted. Jared Henderson was coming, too, with his mounted men pounding behind him.

Instinct rather than reason made Captain Dakin decide to keep clear of all of them. He could deliver his prisoner to Henderson later. Certainly he must avoid gunfire now for the sake of the burden that he carried in his arms. He made a turn and headed desperately for the lake shore, the one direction in which he had a chance of shaking off both bands of pursuers.

The sure footed bay went down through a rocky, ledge filled pasture

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and kicked up the sand of a long beach. Ahead the captain saw a little square building on a rise of ground. A ruined blockhouse, by the looks of it, left from the War of 1812.

The bay had begun to slacken speed after his tremendous effort.

No bullet could penetrate the thick timbers of the blockhouse. Dakin rode up to the building and halted. The black mare that Amy Brent had ridden came galloping to join them.

With a grim laugh Dakin seized the girl's wrists and forced them away from the pistols in his waistcoat. For a moment he thought she was going to sink her teeth into his hand.

"I know the witch of Silverwood better now!" he said. "Go in there ahead of me!"

HE kicked open a door of heavy planks. Then he led the horses in and barred the door. There was a litter of straw on the floor. In the dim light which came down through an opening in the floor above Dakin saw that the massive hinges of the door were still good. He found an oak bar and put it in place. Then he picked the girl up in his arms, despite a stinging blow on the cheek, and lifted her to his shoulder.

"Go up there!" he ordered. "Or I'll spank you like an unruly child!"

She shivered in his grasp, and obeyed. He leaped and caught the edges of the opening, and pulled himself up beside her. The roof was gone, but the wall timbers which remained breast high were solid and there were loopholes for firing down upon an attacking force.

"If your people come," said Dakin, "I can hold them off!"

"And if Henderson comes?" she asked, in a low voice.

Adam Dakin considered her in the clear light of day. There was a trace of fear in the wide, dark eyes, but no hint of yielding. She had changed to a riding habit. The tight bodice rose and fell to her breathing.

"I engaged myself to him for anything that could be done with honor," replied Dakin. "He put me to guard a prisoner and I let the prisoner escape. Now I must make good my failure."

"I understand!" she exclaimed, bitterly. "You will give me over to him again! For money, I suppose! How much will it take to buy you away from Henderson?"

"You are making a mistake," said Captain Dakin, "I am not a traitor."

"Do you know what you are doing?"

"The quarrel is not mine. But I understand that you are preventing Jared Henderson from taking some timber which he bought from your brother, now dead. He had a written conveyance, he says."

"He bought timber and cordwood and he may have it," she cried, desperately. "But he did not buy the land! Twin Mountain is veined from top to foundation with magnetic iron ore! Did Jared Henderson tell you that he claims the land and the mineral rights? That he has tried to sink a shaft and intrench himself there and take out ore for his forge? That mountain is all my fortune! But, as you have said, it is not your quarrel!"

"A shaft?" echoed Dakin. He remembered what the dazed sentry had said. "But Henderson's papers were witnessed before the tavern keeper, McGovern, who is a notary! Or did they lie to me about that?"

"Not directly!" she cried. "Oh, you soldiers are simple folk! Ready to believe what people tell you! McGovern

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is a notary. But the deed was changed to read so that it was inclusive of mineral rights instead of reserving them! Don't you see? The change was made on a valid document and there is a specific conveyance of the mineral rights, which would naturally remain with the land, instead of a specific reservation of them, which was what my brother made."

"I believe you," said Dakin, slowly. "And let me tell you that I sold to Henderson only such service as could be given with honor!"

"What then?" asked the girl in a low voice.

"Why, I shall recover Twin Mountain for you before I go on to Canada," replied Captain Dakin, as though he were promising a box of sweetmeats.

"I have no money to pay you," she told him. "Not until my ore is sold."

"I do not want money for my wages," he said.

A shout turned him to the wall. A horseman had come out of the woods and he had seen them. When he was a few rods nearer Dakin recognized Patch McGovern. The tavern keeper cantered within speaking distance and sat leering up at them.

"McGovern!" called the captain. "Come nearer! I have our prisoner here! Where are her people?"

"Are you betraying me?" she exclaimed, fiercely, clutching at his arm.

CAPTAIN DAKIN did not reply. McGovern rode closer, and his evil eye sparkled.

"We couldn't make out what you was up to," he said. "Henderson's drove her men back to Silverwood and he's a-hunting for you now!"

"She tricked me and got away."

"Aye, I thought she would," grinned McGovern. "And it's lucky for you that you caught her. Henderson's in a murdering temper now."

"Come around to the door," said the captain.

McGovern shifted his gaze for a moment from the top of the blockhouse, looking for the door. The arm of Captain Dakin raised, made a circling movement, and the rope that he had brought to bind the Witch of Silverwood dropped gracefully, with a noose at the end of it. The noose slid over the head and shoulders of Patch McGovern. Dakin braced himself against the wall and lifted. McGovern left his saddle and dangled. His horse shot out from under him.

The tavern keeper seared the air with curses. Dakin pulled in the rope slowly, hand over hand, until a tousled head and brick-red face appeared over the edge of the timber. There was no longer breath for cursing left in the man. His hands clawed and he helped himself over the wooden wall to ease the pressure of the rope that was cutting into chest and armpits. He rolled on the floor. Dakin, sitting on him, took away a long horse pistol and a knife before he tied him up.

"There are some very clever Indians in the mountains of Mexico," said Captain Dakin. "They build a little fire under a man's feet and he tells all that he knows."

"No!" screamed Amy Brent. "Don't torture him, you monster!"

Dakin turned his head to look at her. She was standing so that McGovern, staring up into the face of his captor, could not see her. Slowly the long lashes of one eye swept her cheek, the corners of her mouth turned up but her voice was stricken with horror.

"In Heaven's name spare him what you've done to me!"

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By a supreme effort Adam Dakin managed a snarl of rage.

He felt of the edge of McGovern's knife.

"This knife will do," he said. "I've improved a little on the method of the Indians. My treatment is more permanent, McGovern. I take the hide off in little strips!"

"You brute!" cried Amy. "You beast in human form!"

The tavern keeper's face had turned from red to pasty yellow. Little drops beaded the ridges of his forehead.

"Don't!" he croaked, hoarsely. "Henderson'll kill you—"

"Will that help your feet?" demanded Dakin, and he slid the knife blade between sole and upper of McGovern's boot.

"I'll tell!" shrieked the prisoner. "What you want to know?"

"Who changed the conveyance of the Twin Mountain property?" asked Dakin, grimly.

"I done it!" McGovern choked and swallowed. "I wrote out the paper first off and then Mr. Brent read it and signed it. And after I'd put on my seal and he'd gone, Mr. Henderson scratched out some words with a penknife and I took my quill and wrote in what he said to write, so it would be in the same hand. Brent was careless like. He didn't wait for his copy to be writ off then and afterwards he couldn't have made no fuss, for there was his name on it. But he died afore he knowed about it."

Captain Dakin rose, smiling.

"You have a witness, Miss Brent, to the confession," he said.

Her laughter rang like the tinkling of little bells. Patch McGovern twisted and turned his face, ludicrous with conflicting emotions, from one to the other.

"You wasn't going to skun the bottoms of my feet at all!" he yelled.

A CRY and a shot turned Dakin and Amy Brent again toward the woods. The tall figure of Henderson was there, in the midst of fifteen or twenty mounted men. Armed men on foot came straggling out of the forest until a score or more gathered about the horsemen. They had seen the two figures on top of the blockhouse. Captain Dakin thought fast.

A bullet whined over his head. Jared Henderson had made up his mind that he was betrayed.

"The door is on the lake side," he said to the girl. "There's time for you to take your horse out that way and get down to the shore. They may not see you at all. Anyhow you'll have a good start, and I'll follow."

She hesitated only for a moment. Then without a word she dropped lightly down into the dim lower floor. Dakin looked to his pistols. He listened for a trampling of hoofs, the creak of the door below. Over there at the edge of the woods Henderson was pointing to right and left. The attack was going to be a determined affair.

"Why don't you go?" cried Dakin, through the opening in the floor. "Is anything wrong?"

For a long moment there was no answer. Then came the sound of the door and the thud of hoofs. A high pitched scream rose ringing through the clear air. The mare shot out of the blockhouse at a wild, panic stricken run with a dark figure swaying on her back.

A groan broke from Captain Dakin's lips and for the first time since he had stopped at McGovern's tavern he was

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in despair. A runaway! Henderson's mounted men were streaming out, according to the horseflesh under them, in pursuit. The mare was out of all control.

The footmen out there had started for the blockhouse, with Henderson leading them.

They could see, of course, that Dakin was still there.

The captain dropped down to the lower floor. He would make a running fight for it now.

He felt for a stirrup in the dimness and suddenly shivered and sprang aside as a white apparition materialized beside him.

"Don't look!" exclaimed the soft voice of Amy Brent. "I had to use my skirt and bodice and part of my clothes besides the straw to make that dummy! But it fooled them!"

"No wonder they believe in witchcraft!" cried Dakin. In a moment he was outside with his horse. He lifted an armful of lace and fine linen up beside him.

Then he was riding around the blockhouse. A great shout went up, with Henderson's voice roaring above the tumult. Dakin rode far out on the flank of Henderson's men and tried to shield the girl's body with his own. The mounted men were off chasing the dummy but a rifle ball could travel faster than a horse.

A red welt appeared on the shoulder of the bay, and drove him to his best speed. Dakin's tall beaver was lifted from his head. And then they were out of range, skimming along a forest lined road. They had gone a mile when Captain Dakin drew rein and looked back.

One horseman was coming. It was Henderson, and he had been gaining on them. Dakin let the girl slip to the ground and wheeled. The big man bore straight down upon him and the barrel of a pistol gleamed in the sun. In that instant Adam Dakin was again a dragoon. This was a thundering, glorious charge, with death riding nose and nose.

He drove straight at the enemy, firing with both hands. They met with a shock that rattled Dakin from teeth to heels. They were both down on the ground, with flying, iron shod hoofs about their heads. Blinded by dust and sweat Dakin reached for the indistinct figure beside him. His hand rose and fell and he felt his pistol barrel crunch home on bone.

THE shimmering silver maples lay just ahead. Jared Henderson tramped on foot, a prisoner to be dealt with by the law. Behind him rode Amy Brent on Henderson's horse. She was wrapped in Captain Dakin's skirted coat and her eyes had turned from black to blue, as the lake had turned blue under the rising sun.

Dakin, scratched and torn, wore nevertheless the print of joy on his scarred face. He looked ahead at the chimneys rising above the maples and then at the honey-colored head beside him.

"We lately discussed wages," he said, "and I told you that I did not want money."

"Aye, sir!" Her eyes became more deeply blue. "What are your wages to be?"

"I demand," he replied, gravely, "that the Witch of Silverwood remove the spell she has put upon me!"

"That is one thing," she replied, "that the Witch of Silverwood will never do."

THE END

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MEN of DARING
by Stookie Allen
A WORLD WAR HERO
Sam Woodfill, big rawboned Hoosier, was so modest that his exploits in the world war were overlooked until Gen. Pershing, selecting pallbearers for the Unknown Soldier singled him out as the greatest soldier in the A.E.F.!
SAM WOODFILL
WOODFILL WAS BORN AT BRYANT, INDIANA, IN 1883. HIS FATHER, CAPTAIN JOHN WOODFILL, A WELSHMAN BY BLOOD, FOUGHT GALLANTLY THROUGH THE MEXICAN AND CIVIL WARS. HE TOOK PRIDE IN TEACHING HIS BOY, SAM, HOW TO SHOOT. AT 7 THE YOUNGSTER GOT A BULL'S EYE WITH HIS FATHER'S MUZZLE LOADER. HE TOOK KEENLY TO HUNTING, BECAME AN EXPERT RIFLE SHOT, AND BEAT ALL RIVALS AT TURKEY SHOOTS WHILE ACCEPTING HANDICAPS AND SHOOTING FROM A PRONE POSITION.
YOUNG SAM TRIED TO SIGN UP FOR THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR. HIS YOUTH BARRED HIM BUT AT 18 HE ENLISTED AND GOT HIS BAPTISM OF FIRE IN THE PHILIPPINES. SUBSEQUENTLY HE SAW SERVICE FROM PANAMA TO ALASKA. IN THE FAR NORTH HE KEPT HIS COMRADES SUPPLIED WITH GAME. ON ONE OCCASION HE HAD KILLED TWO BROWN BEARS WHEN A HUGE CINNAMON BEAR RUSHED AT HIM FROM COVER. SAM, SHOOTING FROM THE HIP, BROKE THE BEAST'S SPINE THEN KILLED HIM WITH A JACK KNIFE.

Next Week: Prof. S. A. Andree, Arctic Balloonist

Also, "Women of Daring": Milana Jank, Mountain Climber

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BEFORE HE WENT OVERSEAS IN 1917 SERGEANT SAM MARRIED LORENA WILTSHIRE, A DESCENDANT OF DANIEL BOONE. FIGHTING WITH THE FIFTH DIVISION AS A LIEUTENANT, WOODFILL GOT INTO NUMEROUS FRONT LINE, HAND-TO-HAND ACTIONS.
AT CUNEL WOODFILL, ACTING ALONE, CAPTURED 3 MACHINE-GUN EMPLACEMENTS AND KILLED 19 OF THE FOE! THIS AND OTHER FEATS OF BRAVERY GOT HIM A CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL, THE CROIX DE GUERRE AND OTHER DECORATIONS. IN THE FIRST SET-TO 4 GERMANS ATTACKED HIM. SAM SHOT 3 AND FELLED THE OTHER HAND-TO-HAND. HE RUSHED A SECOND NEST, SILENCED ITS GUN, SHOT SEVERAL FOES AND TOOK 3 PRISONERS. STORMING A THIRD POSITION, HE GOT 5 MEN WITH HIS GUN. WHEN HIS PISTOL JAMMED HE KILLED TWO REMAINING COMBATANTS WITH A PICK!
THAT DEED WAS BURIED IN OFFICIAL RECORDS UNTIL GENERAL PERSHING'S REPORT ON WORLD WAR SOLDIERS BROUGHT IT TO LIGHT. IN A BRIEF TIME WOODFILL WON PROMOTION TO A CAPTAINCY. MUSTERED OUT, HE RELUCTANTLY SETTLED DOWN TO CIVILIAN LIFE IN KENTUCKY—STILL LONGING FOR A SOLDIER'S LIFE.

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"Get out of the fort!" the major roared at the White Indian

Brother of the Cheyennes

By MAX BRAND

Author of "The Masterman," "The White Indian," etc.

Rusty Sabin, who had grown up with savages, knew fierce loyalties that his more civilized white brothers could not understand

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

BILL TENNEY, who had been a thief, lower on the Tulmac River, would never have believed that he could covet any mere animal so much. But when he saw that famous White Horse, as it arrived at Fort Marston in the company of its even more famous master, Rusty Sabin, Tenney knew that some day he would have to have that horse for his own.

His subsequent action was still more difficult to understand. For impulsively, when an accident occurred to the steamboat as it was landing, Bill Tenney managed to save both Sabin and his horse from drowning. He had never done anything so heroic in his life. However, he didn't give up his idea of owning the horse, even if he had to steal him.

Rusty Sabin was a curious figure. As a small child he had been stolen by the Cheyennes, who had called him Red Hawk and raised him in accordance with their tribal customs. The redmen, especially Rusty's friends, Little Porcupine and Broken Arrow, believed him to be a powerful medicine man; and Rusty would have been the first to agree that

This story began in the Argosy for March 17

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his good fortune in life had been the result of something more than luck.

With white men, too, he was regarded with some respect—even though they contemptuously called the big redheaded man the White Indian—for he had had the further good luck to uncover a rich gold strike. With his gold Rusty for a time supported his father, Marshall Sabin, who was a well known Indian fighter known to the Pawnee tribe which had adopted him as Wind Walker. Rusty also supported the impoverished Lester family, who had befriended him in the past. Richard Lester was suffering from tuberculosis; and the fair Maisry, his daughter, had completely won Rusty Sabin's heart.

Then Rusty Sabin was made desolate by the disappearance of his father, who found life in this white settlement even more unbearable than Rusty did. Marshall Sabin went back to live with the Pawnees; and nothing that Maisry or any one else could say would comfort Rusty.

Rusty established himself in Fort Marston as a blacksmith, which was the only trade he knew. But he could hardly have guessed that it would be this lowly trade that would enable Major Marston, head of the army post which bore his name, to contrast more sharply his own civilized superiority with the uncouthness and lack of breeding of Rusty Sabin. And that contrast the major very much desired to establish for the benefit of Maisry Lester, who had caught his fancy.

CHAPTER VII.

A FALLEN HERO.

BILL TENNEY had a bruised shoulder and a bump over one eye, after he landed on the ground of the corral. But in his heart there was a spirit of quiet content, and a resolution. He had bought a powerful, cruel Spanish bit with which, he told himself, he would be able to control even the savage head of the stallion, for Rusty always rode the White Horse with no more than a light hackamore. And as for pitching, if a horse is hobbled or sidelined it cannot buck efficiently.

The next time he tried his hand on the White Horse, he would work with the utmost skill that his experience had taught him. Nothing would be left to chance. In fact, already he could almost feel between his knees the barrel of the great horse, sleeked over and quivering with strength, sweeping him across the prairies like a bird across the sky.

He took his confidence of victory with him to Tom Wayling's saloon, and stood in front of the mirror which the Cheyennes had cracked as he swallowed a glass or two of red-eye, slowly. He wanted to brood on the future. He wanted to call up the pictures of the things that he would do when he had the White Horse under him. He could see camps in confusion, men mounting their ponies to pursue a raider, and the plunder and the plunderer borne swiftly away on the back of the stallion. He could see himself laughing at pursuit; toying with it. He could see himself overtaking his enemy as surely as a heaven-directed bolt of lightning.

These images, pleasant to the mind of wolfish Bill Tenney, kept a smile working in and around the corners of his mouth. Sinister laughter flashed in his eyes, and dimmed again. Certainly nothing was farther from his mind than the thought of gray-headed Dikkon Saunders, from whose trading post down the Tulmac River he had stolen the twenty pounds of gold. Even when he heard the quiet voice saying:

"There he is, boys!" it was a moment before Tenney realized.

Then, from the corner of his eye, he saw four men closing on him, among

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them gray-headed Dikkon Saunders himself.

Bill Tenney lifted his whiskey glass, poured the last of his drink down his throat as though totally oblivious of the danger around him, and then leaped for the window! He reached it, too, and would have bounded out into the open night in another instant, but the swinging butt of a rifle in Saunders's hands clicked against his skull and dropped him in a heap.

When his wits came back to him, there was no longer the pressure of a heavy money belt across his loins, and he was being marched up the street of the town by a pair of long-haired plainsmen, each of whom securely gripped one of his arms. Weaponless as he now was, he would have put up a fight against these fellows, beyond a doubt, but before him walked a third man, and two more strode at his back. Therefore he said nothing; attempted nothing. A trapped wolf may lie still, too wise to struggle; and Bill Tenney could do the same. A great many of the townsmen came out to look, and they saw Tenney, so recently a hero, now walking in the swinging lantern light, under guard, and bound for the fort which was also the prison.

Only one face meant anything to Tenney. That was the calm countenance of Rusty Sabin, who stared straight ahead and seemed to see nothing as Tenney was led past the blacksmith shop. And Tenney wanted to turn and curse the man's indifference; this man whom he had saved from the river. However, he said nothing here. Neither did he speak when he got to the gate of the fort, where the soldiers took him over. There only Dikkon Saunders and one witness were admitted. They brought out irons, and fastened Bill Tenney's hands together. Then they led him into a guardroom, long and dreary and empty, except for two tables and some benches, all covered with carved initials.

PRESENTLY an orderly came into the room, leaving an inner door open; and through this Saunders was marched into the presence of Major Marston. Bill Tenney recognized the major, of course. He felt that he would have recognized a representative of the law and of the army, merely by the cold detestation that ran through his own vitals. He lifted his eyes, once and looked long and searchingly into the major's face. Then he dropped his gaze to the floor. It was not often that Tenney stared people in the face. His eyes were a weapon, to be used as such.

The major, his hands in his pockets so that the stiff skirts of his jacket flared straight out, walked up and down behind the desk on the raised dais, which added to his dignity of command. He gave Tenney only a casual observance at each of his turns.

"Charge?" he said.

"Robbery," said the sergeant.

"The fellow looks like a stealing coyote.—No, more like a wolf," said the major. "I've seen him before. Pulling something out of the water, that time." He laughed as he said this. "Go on with the charge, sergeant."

It was briefly rehearsed—how Bill Tenney had entered the trading post when only two men were there, backed them into a corner with his levelled rifle, and broken open the cash box. The money had been found again on his person. It was exhibited in the money belt.

The major picked up the belt, whistled as he felt the amount of the

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burden, tossed it down with a crash on the desk, and then continued his promenade, laughing a little. It pleased him to administer justice. He was delighted to be the only judge in the district, and these impromptu duties helped to fill out the measure of his self-importance. Still chuckling he said:

"Only a mad wolf will steal by daylight. You should have known that, Tenney. Now you're going to be taken down where you'll cool off. We have some rooms down there beside the river that raise mold about as fast as the prairies grow grass in the spring. You're going to have a chance to enjoy a quiet rest down there. You're going to have a chance to think things over. I'll be thinking, too. I'll be deciding what to do with you. But before you're put into such a cool place, we'll warm you up. We'll give you the warmest shirt you ever wore in your life. We'll give you a red shirt, Tenney."

Laughter stopped his speech again. His eyes were actually merry as they danced over Tenney.

Then he said: "Take him out in the yard and give him the whip."

"How many strokes, sir?" said the sergeant.

"I don't know," said the major. "I'll have to see about that. Get a blacksnake, and bring in one of the teamsters."

THEY took Bill Tenney out into the central yard of the fort and tied him to a post. They stripped him naked to the waist, and tied him by the manacles that held his wrists. The post was so low that he had to bend over a bit, and that made the huge muscles in his back stand out. Those muscles sprang in ridges from the small of the back, and rippled away in rapidly undulating waves over the shoulders.

The man did not seem naked somehow. He was clothed in his strength. And his long hair fell down over his face like a mask of darkness.

The teamster was a wide-jawed brute with the face of a frog—a hunchback with arms that were vastly long and powerful. He chewed tobacco, and spat a thin jet through his teeth between each of the whip strokes which he deliberately laid on the back of Bill Tenney. The teamster loved this work. First, as he slicked the blacksnake through the palm of his left hand, he said to the major:

"You want blood, or no blood, major?"

"Which hurts worst?" asked Major Marston.

"I dunno," said the teamster. "It's sort of a matter of what you want. I've seen mules that sure hated the flat whang of the whip and the welt it raised on 'em. And I've seen mules that don't mind a thump, but that rear and tear when the blood begins to trickle down. There's mules that I always keep a raw spot on, on each side of the tail. Once I get 'em raw, I keep 'em raw. Then, with just a leetle flicker of the lash, they try to climb out through their collars.— And there's still others that I keep one big welt on, and when it comes times to make 'em scratch, I give 'em a little tap on the old welt, and they groan like they was human."

The teamster laughed. The major laughed also.

"Try it plain. Try a few welts, first," said the major.

The teamster tried a few welts. They stood out red and round on the back of Tenney. First there was a

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white streak with blue edges. Then the white turned crimson and began to swell. The sound of these strokes was like the falling of a rod. Tenney did not stir. He got his hands on the top of the post, and gripped until the big muscles of his arms stood out and trembled. That was the only thing about him that moved.

SUDDENLY the major called out with a strange ring in his voice: "Blood! Blood, man! Tap the red, and let it run a while."

The teamster, without pausing in his swaying motions, spat yellow through his teeth and turned his wide, horrible grin over his shoulder toward the major. At the same time, the whip struck with a different sound; there was a smart popping, and instantly a trickle of red flowed down Bill Tenney's back. A shudder ran through him at the same time. And the major, marking this with a cheerful eye, shouted:

"That's it! Let him have it, now. Let's see the red come out of him."

Every stroke of the whip sliced the flesh; and in a few moments Tenney's back was crimson. The red ran down over his trousers. But after the first slight movement, he did not stir.

The major kept drawing closer and closer, until a flicker of thin red drops flew off the end of the lash and streaked his face. At that, he leaped back with an oath. He pulled out a handkerchief and scrubbed at his face.

"All right," he called, finally. "Let up on him now. We'll just have his dirty back washed clean, now. Get some salt and water and pour a little vinegar into it. We'll clean the wounds the whip made, for him!"

They brought the acrid solution, and mopped Tenney's back with it. As the torture struck into his flesh, the salt soaking in, the vinegar biting him, he permitted his shoulders to jerk upward, once. Then he remained still, even as he was freed from the post. His shirt was pulled over his head again, and dragged violently down over his tortured body.

He stood up straight and shook the long hair back from his face. His running sweat had clogged the hair in long, ugly locks. He was utterly colorless. At several paces, the sound of his breathing was audible. And his eyes rolled with a yellow fire as he stared at the major. Major Marston laughed again, as he stepped closer.

"You don't like it, eh?" he said. "Having dreams of stabbing me in the back one night, are you? But I know how to turn wolves like you into dogs, and dogs into curs. And I make the curs crawl and lick the hand that beats 'em.—Now take him away, and put him in the coolest and the deepest room you can find."

CHAPTER VIII.

VOICE FROM THE SKY.

IF Rusty Sabin's face had been empty when he saw Tenney as he was marched past, it was because Rusty was seeing before him, very clearly, a distant thing that meant more than the realities at hand. He was seeing duty, on which he would never turn his back.

Afterward, he went through the crowd and found his two Cheyennes, shoulder to shoulder. He laid his hand on the naked arm of Broken Arrow, and his fingers moved rapidly. There are few Indians who cannot read the sign language of the plains by touch, in the midst of darkness.

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As Rusty left the spot, Broken Arrow and Little Porcupine did not follow him at once. It was some time before they appeared behind the blacksmith shop, and then they had with them three strong-bodied ponies. Rusty stood in the starlight and made them a brief speech:

"I lay in the river, and the Underwater People took hold on me and were pulling me down. Then my white brother came and drew me out. That was a thing which you saw. Also, you have seen him taken captive by his enemies. They have brought him into the fort. Therefore we must follow him and bring him out again."

After this, there was a breath of silence in which the chill of fear could sink into the soul like the starlight into staring eyes. But finally Broken Arrow said:

"The war chief of the white men is in the fort. His best warriors are around him. They have many guns and their eyes never closed."

"Sweet Medicine shall help us," said Rusty Sabin, confidently.

"Then we may go safely?" asked Broken Arrow.

"A man with fear in his heart is never safe," answered Rusty.

Little Porcupine had not spoken before. Now he said:

"Where we were closed in the place of the firewater, we never should have come out alive except for Red Hawk. If he asks for our lives now, they are not ours; they belong to him."

"Go up to the gate of the fort," said Rusty. "You can look between the big bars. Perhaps you will see where they are taking my brother."

The two left him at once, and Rusty turned back into the blacksmith shop with a lighted lantern. The smell of the smoke reeked from the blackening walls. He picked up the fourteen-pound sledge whose handle was already well polished by his grasp as he swayed the heavy engine. He glanced toward the bin which he had filled with discarded horseshoes. Then he spread out his hands and stared down at the palms, where the skin had grown thick.

He might be leaving this place and this life. If he managed to take Tenney from the fort, doubtless he would have to flee with him; and in that case there would be no return.

Writing was not easy for him, but he sat down and laboriously spelled out a letter!

I go back to my people, perhaps. I go for a little time or for a long time. The Green Beetle will tell you every day that my heart remains with you. Farewell.

On the outside of the letter he wrote "Maisry," and stuck the paper into a crack of the wall, where it would surely be seen by the first eye. It did not occur to him, at the moment, that people should be identified by two names instead of by one.

AFTERWARD, he got his knife. It was eighteen inches long. He had forged it himself, of the finest steel; and while he was totally unskilled with rifle or pistol or the bows and arrows which had still been in use among the Cheyennes in the days of his boyhood, he was expert in the wielding of that long, heavy blade, whether thrown or used hand to hand. He looked down the blue, curving shimmer of the steel for a moment, now, and then freshened his grip on the handle.

He was still holding the knife when the two Cheyennes returned. Their faces, to an ordinary eye, would have been considered totally expressionless,

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but to the observance of Rusty's every feature of them bespoke excitement.

Little Porcupine said, briefly, "They tied your white brother to a post and beat him like a dog, and the white war chief stood close by and laughed. They beat your brother till his back was red, and then they took him away. And the white war chief is still laughing."

Rusty closed his eyes. When he opened them again, a thin fingertip of light was running rapidly up and down the edge of his knife as it wavered slightly in the fierceness of his grip.

Together, they went all around the fort, walking quietly and apart. When men walk together, they all see the same things. When they go one by one, each man looks for himself.

When they had joined each other again, each gave his report; but not a single detail was useful to Rusty Sabin except that Little Porcupine had surely seen the war chief walking up and down behind an open window on the river side of the fort.

Rusty, looking wildly around him, found no inspiration in the dark of the night, so he sat down, cross-legged, jointed his pipe, filled it, sprinkled tinder from his pouch on top of the tobacco, and then kindled the smoke. He blew out puffs that were faintly visible in the starlight, and then he held up his hands, the pipe fixed upside down in one of them. He would hold up his arms in this manner until the ache of weariness turned them to lead and made them fall, unless before that time Sweet Medicine brought wisdom to his mind.

Broken Arrow whispered to his companion.

"Be very still. He prays to Sweet Medicine!"

Then, gradually, all the sounds from the village died out of Rusty's ears. He no longer heard the barking of the two dogs, one of them yipping in soprano and one howling a deep bass. A jangle of strings, and the sound of two men singing, also faded from his ears. The lights blurred and went out.

In the intensity of his concentration he felt himself swept far away, and once more he was before the great pillar at the mouth of the Sacred Valley of the Cheyennes, praying to the great spirit, Sweet Medicine. He thought of the wide, whispering wings of the owl that had flown over his head on that day, long ago. And it seemed to Rusty that the same whisper stole through his ears again.

THEN, blindingly bright, he saw the face of the major, laughing.

He had marked Major Marston long before this, on the outskirts of his attention, and he had not marked him with favor. The major's superior airs were perfectly patent. If Rusty paid no attention to them, it was because he chose to overlook those annoying mannerisms which always drew attention, subtly, from the rough manners of Rusty and to the major's gentility.

Above all, there had been the day when the major had walked into the blacksmith shop, accompanied by Maisry, and sneeringly remarked:

"Well, there have to be some honest laborers in the world. Every man cannot work with his brain."

These words floated back into Rusty's recollection. And then he thought, also, of Tenney under the lash, his back flowing crimson.

Still the face of the major persisted before him. And suddenly Rusty's arms dropped.

"*Hai!*" whispered Little Porcupine. "There is no answer?"

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"There is the war chief of the whites," said Rusty. "That is the answer."

"Is the name of the man an answer to this prayer, my father?" asked Broken Arrow.

"It is the answer which was given to me," Rusty said, briefly, as he stood up.

"What does it mean?"

"The Sky People," said Rusty, sternly, "do not always speak out clearly. They give a sound, they give a vision, and wise men know its meaning."

"We wait for you to tell us, father," said Broken Arrow, humbly. "Our minds are empty, but our hands belong to you."

Rusty began to pace up and down. His arms still ached at the shoulders. The darkness of his moment of prayer was gone. He could hear the singing; the barking of the dogs again. The slamming of a door not far off startled him.

What was the meaning of the thing he had seen? And still it persisted in his brain—the face of Major Marston, laughing!

He stopped short.

"We are to go to him," he said.

Broken Arrow uttered an exclamation.

"Go to him?" he said. "Break open the gate or leap over the wall? Father, if all the Cheyennes were gathered together here, it still would be a mighty day of work for them to do that thing! How shall we come to him?"

"By the open window, behind which you saw him walking," said Rusty.

"It is high up the wall!" said Broken Arrow.

"We shall climb to the place," said Rusty. "A voice has spoken to me from the sky. Shall we not follow it, brothers?"

CHAPTER IX.

KEEPING FAITH.

THE wall, as it turned out, was high indeed, up to the window behind which the major still strolled back and forth, now and then singing a note or two from some Negro melody. But the face of the wall, for greater strength, sloped outward, toward the base, and the stones of which it was built were so huge and so roughly bound together that there were ten thousand small finger-holds and toe-holds scattered across the face of it. Little Porcupine, when he had examined the wall, uttered a whispering laugh.

"See!" he said. "Already Sweet Medicine is with us. He has given us a ladder and a path up the height!"

It was not even necessary to strip away the moccasins so that the toes could get a better grip.

Little Porcupine was the first up the wall, and grasping the sill of the window, he waited until the other two were beside him.

Inside, Rusty could see a big, comfortably furnished bedroom, with a fireplace built into one wall and a range of books along a shelf. When he looked at those books and considered the millions of words that must fill them, his heart shrank a little. A man who had read so much must surely have mastered some strong medicine—even something as strong, perhaps, as the power of the Sky People of the Cheyennes!

The major, contented by his thoughts, kept smiling as he walked. He kept his hands folded behind his

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back, most of the time, but occasionally he made a gesture as though snapping a whip before him. And once, as he did this, he actually laughed aloud. So that it was clear that he was remembering the flogging of big Bill Tenney. When Rusty was sure of this, a terrible rage blinded him. He shuddered so that he seemed about to fall, and the powerful arm of Broken Arrow steadied him in his place.

Then Rusty whispered in the ear of his companions, "I go first. Follow when I give the sign."

At this moment, the major was at the farther end of the room, about to turn. Before he had swung around, Rusty was standing inside the window, with his arms folded high on his breast. The major started and actually sprang back a pace, when he turned and saw this unexpected sight. Then he exclaimed:

"The blacksmith, eh? Now, how the devil did you get there, Sabin?"

Rusty smiled in his turn, and almost without malice.

"When a friend calls to a friend," he said, "the call must be answered."

"Am I your friend, Sabin?" asked the major, his eyes working over the blacksmith's still sooty face.

Rusty shrugged his shoulders at that apparent sneer.

"My friend," he answered, "is now closed up in the fort. His back is raw—from the whip. I have come to talk about him."

"Ah! So he's your friend, is he? You shouldn't have friends among thieves, Sabin. You know what they say: 'Birds of a feather flock together.' Eh?"

He laughed as he made his point, but Rusty answered. "He has given me my life. Shall I call the hand that saves me unclean?"

He made a gesture, as he said this; and the major's lip twitched as he saw the grime on the fingers.

"SOME people like dirty hands as well as clean ones," remarked Marston. "What can you say to me about Bill Tenney?"

"He took the gold of another man," said Rusty. "Therefore he was tied to a post and flogged. What else will be done with him?"

"He may be flogged again," said the major. "I don't know. I haven't decided what to do with him, yet. There are too many thieves and scoundrels in this part of the world, and we must teach them lessons. I have to be the teacher—and I don't really mind the work.—I may keep Tenney in irons, and send him down the river to the first prison. I don't know. I haven't decided what to do. Have you any ideas about it, Sabin?"

Curiosity and malice joined equally in his voice.

"I will give you money; I will give you horses, if you set him free," Rusty answered.

"Buying him, are you?"

"Money buys all things from the white men," answered Rusty, confidently.

"You'll give horses for him?"

"Yes."

"You'll give the White Horse?"

At this, Rusty started violently and lifted his eyes toward the ceiling as if he might find the answer written there. Then he replied:

"The White Horse is not mine to give away. He stays with me because he loves me. How could I give him away, except to his old freedom?"

There was such obvious sincerity in this speech that it troubled the major. He had looked upon Rusty as a wild

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man—a freak—a strange creature of fortune. He saw now that there was something else in the man, and a profundity of goodness and justice that made his own soul seem both small and evil. And to a man of the major's pride and self-sufficiency, this discovery was merely an injection of poison. He had scorned and derided Rusty before; now he hated him with a whole and perfect hatred. For he understood now that Maisry saw in this man not merely a striking figure of the frontier—a romantic hero—but a man whose soul was of the true steel of integrity. If Rusty Sabin's manners were still, very often, those of a wild Indian, his spirit was both wise and brave.

Rusty had previously made the major feel the superiority of civilization over the barbaric life. Now he made sure that his only superiority was that of greater place and power. The major was not abashed by that discovery. He was simply offended. So he said:

"You're willing to give away anything for Bill Tenney, who saved your life. You're willing to give everything except the things you care about. Well, Sabin, you may have bought off other white men with your gold, but you can't buy me off. I represent justice, out here on the plains, and justice is going to run its course with Bill Tenney. The man's a wolf, and he has to be treated like the beast that he is. In the meantime, it's late and I'm going to bed. You had better get out of here by the way you came."

To his amazement, Rusty merely shook his head.

"You're not going?" demanded Marston, thrusting out his jaw a little.

"We have only begun to talk," answered Rusty gently. "I am asking you to be generous and kind to a helpless man. You have hurt him and shamed him a great deal. Pain of hunger is bad; pain of fire is worse; but these things can be cured and forgotten. Shame is a sickness that never leaves the soul of a man. You have shamed my brother. Now you must set him free and let him try to be a man again in his own eyes. For that, he will need much time and many great deeds."

THE temper of the major snapped short. He pointed suddenly at the door and exclaimed:

"Get out!" He added, "I've had enough of this damned nonsense! I've given you enough hints, and now I'll give you facts. Get out of this fort!"

The major, as anger and enthusiasm grew within him, squared himself close to the window, confronting Rusty. Rusty now spoke one deep-voiced word in Cheyenne; and instantly, two long, naked, copper-colored arms leaped through the window-square; and two mighty hands fastened on Major Marston.

He tried to yell, but one of those hands was grasping his throat, shutting off the sound. He tried to wrench his revolver from the holster at his hip, but Rusty Sabin caught his wrist with a grip that was iron-strong from the swinging of heavy sledges. The two huge Cheyennes then slipped in through the window, and at sight of them the major stopped struggling. Rusty touched the hand that was throttling the white war chief and that hand fell away.

Major Marston, for a moment, was fully occupied in getting his breath again; after that, as his eyes cleared, he stared at Rusty. There was plenty of courage in the major; he showed it now in this time of high danger.

"Well?" he demanded briefly.

"My brother has had the whip un-

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til his back was red," said Rusty. "There will be no whip for you, if you do as I say; if you send at once for Bill Tenney."

"I am to send for the guard, and let him see you all in here?" demanded Marston.

"Open the door just a little, speak through the gap, and no one will be seen," said Rusty. "I shall stand behind you with this."

As he spoke, he drew out the blue, glistening length of the knife. The major's glance dwelt on the curve of the blade. He could almost feel the cold of the metal in his warm flesh.

So he walked to the door, with Rusty stepping like a shadow behind him, and opening the door a bit he called out. The half sleeping orderly at the end of the little outer chamber jumped to his feet and saluted.

"Send for Bill Tenney—the fellow who was put in the cellar this evening," commanded the major. "Have him brought here at once."

He closed the door and turned, slowly. The white in his face was the white of the shame that would be his next morning, when the town would awaken to the discovery that Tenney was gone. They would have many things to guess about that disappearance; and none of their guesses would be favorable to the major, because he knew that he had won the respect but had never gained the love of the frontiersmen.

"Sabin," he said, "are you being wise? Are you thinking of things to come? Are you remembering that you never can show your face in the fort again? Are you realizing that one day I may have *you* at the whipping post?"

Rusty, for answer, merely shrugged his shoulders and sighed audibly.

"A man must go where his friends require him," he said.

It was a remark that the major made nothing of, however, and a moment later they heard the trampling of feet and the jangling of chains in the outer room.

The two big Indians had stepped back into a shadowed corner. The major now pulled the door wide, with the point of Rusty's knife gently pricking the skin of his back between the shoulder blades.

"Send him in alone," commanded Marston. "I want to examine him."

Bill Tenney strode across the threshold. The major closed the door behind him and locked it.

AS for Tenney, one glance at the Indian, and the sight of the long knife in Rusty's hand, told him what was happening. He lifted his manacled hands to smash Marston's skull with the weight of the irons; but Rusty raised a finger, and Little Porcupine caught Tenney's arms. The thief stood still, breathing hard, and muttering:

"Let me have him, Sabin. By heaven, I've earned a chance at him, and I gotta have it!—Leave him and me alone. Irons or no irons, I'll handle him!"

"We've made a bargain," answered Rusty. "He sets you free, and then he's safe from us—for to-night at least."

Tenney began to nod.

"Aye, it's better," he said. "Choking him ain't the way. I gotta have time to think out the best way of murderin' him; and when I've thought it out, I'm gonna do the trick."

"You have the key of the manacles?" asked Rusty of the major.

Marston silently pulled out a bunch of keys, selected one, and turned the oiled lock. Tenney's hands were in-

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stantly free, and he extended his arms above his head in a great gesture, opening and closing his fingers. As he straightened, the blood-stiffened shirt on his back gave out a crackling noise. Rusty motioned to the Cheyennes.

"Tie him!" he commanded, indicating the major.

A blanket, quickly slashed into strips, offered the means of binding the major. He was wrapped like a mummy, with his hands against his sides. A gag insured his silence, and he was bound to the foot of the bed. Only when the work was done did Broken Arrow say in the Cheyenne tongue:

"You know, father, that dead enemies make long nights of sleep?"

He held poised above Marston's throat the glittering blade of a small knife. The major, feeling himself trussed and ready for the slaughter, and unable to voice a plea for mercy, turned his desperate eyes toward Rusty and thanked his gods when Sabin shook his head.

"We keep faith," said Rusty simply. "Even with liars!"

CHAPTER X.

MANHUNT.

THE major lay perfectly still for a time. He felt that he was lying there endless hours; but each slow second had for him all the timelessness of the moments when a man faces death. The major was facing worse than death. He was being shamed; and mingled with his agony there was a vast incredulity, for he felt that this thing he was suffering could not be.

His four tormentors had slipped out the window of his room and had climbed soundlessly down in the outer night. He had heard only one soft thump as their feet struck the ground. Now they were gone. In his imagination, it was as though the wind were blowing them, sweeping them toward the horizon from which they would never reappear. He thought of himself as a pillar of fire; reaching for them; failing hopelessly to catch them.

To make his madness complete, he could not rid himself of that profound sense of a certain nobility in Rusty Sabin. The man had said that he would keep faith, even with liars. Well, if Rusty and his damned nobility ever came into the hands of the major, there would be an end of both.

All this while, he was making vague, struggling efforts to loosen his bonds. The material of the blanketing had been wrapped very tightly around him, almost tightly enough to stop the circulation of the blood in his arms and his legs. But there was a slight give in the woolen fabric; and as he strained from the shoulders and the hips, he could feel the bonds that fastened him to the bed yielding a trifle. But it was a slow business.

He tried to work his tongue back behind the gag and so spit it out; and his tongue began to ache. It gathered in a great bunch at the top of his mouth and closed the air passages. For a frenzied moment he was sure that he was stifling himself. Then the tip of the tongue got a purchase and thrust the gag a little forward until it wadded hard and firm behind his teeth.

Not a particle of air was entering his lungs now. He could feel his face swelling, his eyes thrusting out. But still he persisted. And in a silent outburst of savagery he told himself that it was better to stifle with rage and a

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gag than to be discovered tied like a helpless dog in this fashion.

The thing would never be forgotten; not while he lived. Men on the frontier did not forget. They would laugh forever at what had happened to the dignity of the military.

Straining his jaws so wide that they threatened to crack, a final convulsive effort of the tongue thrust the gag out. Still he could not breathe, however. For an instant he felt that his lungs were bursting; that the imprisoned air would never leave them so that new oxygen could enter. But finally he could gasp, and then he could breathe. And suddenly the gasping shout came, tearing his throat:

"Help! H e l p!—Orderly!—Damn you, where are you?—Help!"

There was a hasty trampling of feet, a wrenching at the outer knob of the door.

"Break it down, you fools!" yelled the major, regaining his full voice.

A metal crash of musket butts smote the door to the ground. The sound was like the boom of a big gun. And in a moment the excited faces of his men were above the major.

They cut him free; they helped him to his feet; but even before he was erect he was snarling orders.

"Call the trumpeter. Sound 'Boots and Saddles.' Turn out the command.—Some of you head straight for the blacksmith shop. Get your hands on Rusty Sabin. Get him dead or get him alive!—The damned white Indian! Take hold on him.—I'll make the man who gets him!"

They fled with these orders, but they did not run so fast that they were unable to exchange glances on the way. There are jokes in every military command, but few to equal the sight of a commander, stretched on the floor of his own room, tied fast in strips of his own blankets. And the major was not especially loved by those under him.

By the time he had buckled on his saber and revolver and clamped his hat on his head, he could hear in the central yard of the fort the bugles sounding the thrilling call to horse. He could hear the entire stretch of the barracks resounding with suddenly roused life. Then he rushed down from his room to lead the manhunt.

AS Rusty and his three companions had reached the ground, big Bill Tenney grasped Sabin's arm and muttered at his ear:

"Partner, now we're quits, and on the level."

He was amazed by Rusty's reply:

"Brother, so long as I breathe, I shall always owe my life to you."

The thing stunned Tenney. In his world, there is nothing that cannot be bought and paid for, and often at bargain prices. But a gift to Rusty Sabin seemed to be a thing that could not be repaid, even if its own weight and value were returned over and over again. That was a fine point for puzzling over, and there was no time now for pondering. Instead, they were forced to race across the town, across the main street, and then, taking the way behind the houses, they came to the rear of the blacksmith shop. No one had seen the escaped prisoner, up to this moment; and there at hand were the four horses, waiting, bridled and saddled. They mounted, but even as they were putting their feet into stirrups, the note of a bugle rode thin and sharp across the air.

"'Boots and Saddles'! 'Boots and Saddles'!" said Bill Tenney.

He turned in the darkness and shook his fist at the sound.

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"I'll boot and saddle you, damn you!—Rusty, the major's loose, and the fort's been warned. They'll be piling after us like devils, and we gotta ride.—Are the nags good?"

"They're as tough," said Rusty, "as Indians know how to pick out. And Indians know."

They jogged a short distance from the shop, into the starlight. Then, with loosened reins, they fled. All saving Rusty. He, with a word now and then, had to teach the White Horse that this was not a race but a ride, in company. And Bill Tenney, looking aside to the dim shimmering of the stallion, marked the mighty sweep of that stride, so light and reaching that it seemed to be buoyed up by the beat of invisible wings.

A terrible yearning came over Bill Tenney's spirit, and a great pain stabbed into his vitals. He could not understand that pain. It had never tormented him before in all his days. It was a thing of the spirit; and yet it was almost physical agony. He wanted that horse; but the stallion belonged to Rusty, and Rusty Sabin was his friend.

IT came suddenly to Tenney that never had he had a friend before. He had known many men; he had roughed and played and gamed and fought and companioned with them, but they had not been friends. They had been picked up and thrown away like gloves, soon worn out in heavy weather. But between him and Rusty something else had happened. He had risked his life for Rusty, and Rusty had risked his life for the thief. The double payment did not cancel out. No, for Tenney now felt that there was an overplus on both sides. Between them was a strange tie.

He wanted the White Horse. He would have it at any cost. But he could not help wishing that the theft would be made at the expense of any man in the world other than Rusty Sabin.

They were well out on the easily rolling waves of the prairie, by this time, and Tenney called:

"Ain't any use burning ourselves out, Rusty. They can't find us now!"

"Dogs!" called Rusty in answer. "They have dogs for the trailing."

And the steady, swift gallop continued.

Then, confused like the blended voices of many church bells, and beating all on different notes, Tenney heard the chorus of the dogs awaken from the direction of the town. The two Cheyennes instantly increased the gait of their horses. Rusty pulled the stallion over to Tenney, saying:

"We still need luck. I thought that it would be at least an hour or so before the major was found. It might even have been till morning. But the luck was against us then, and it seems to be against us now."

"Why?" answered Tenney. "This nag of mine is jumpin' right along. And God knows that they ain't gonna tag you on that White Horse!"

"I'm with *you*," answered Rusty. "If they take you, they'll take me."

Tenney blinked at that. The stars actually whirled into streaks of thin radiance before his eyes. He couldn't understand it. What was the use of having the swiftest horse on the plains, if the rider anchored himself by fanatic loyalty like this?

Aye, but the talk was well enough. It would be time enough to prove such statements if ever the men of the fort came close on their heels, and if the Indian ponies faltered while the White

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Horse was still full of running. Yet a cold uneasiness remained in Tenney's breast and the sense that heretofore he might, perhaps, have been living only on the surface of this human world, divorced from all insight into the depths of great emotions.

CHAPTER XI.

TAKING THE PRIZE.

THEY rode all night.

They struck a vast intertangling of gullies which the rains had ripped out of the heart of the plains. No better hiding places could have been wished than these labyrinths, but they were useless to men who were being trailed by dogs; and always, sometimes dying down to a dreadful whisper, sometimes blown loudly along the wind, they could hear the music of the hounds.

Rusty could remember them well. Bloodhounds, and a few common mongrels and fox hounds, were at the nose of the pack. Greyhounds were the far-striking missiles, as it were. And in addition, there were a number of powerful brutes, cross-bred between greyhound and mastiffs, and strong enough to fight bears, savage enough to kill men. They were regularly exercised and trained by capable handlers at the fort, and the dog-pack was, in fact, Major Marston's contribution to Indian fighting. No trails were blind on which the dogs could run; and more than once he had been able to follow a party of raiders to a great distance, striking them when they were blinded by their sense of security.

The two Cheyennes, as the dawn came gray over the plains, were plainly worried. They said:

"The white war chief has many men, father. He has two horses for each man. His heart is angry, and he will drive his men like eagles across the sky. We are not going fast enough. Is Sweet Medicine to give us strength, or turn us into clouds?"

There was no irony in this. The Cheyennes had seen Rusty in so many strange scenes that they had in him a more than implicit confidence. Rusty answered with a vague gesture, because his heart was beginning to grow heavy.—Turn them into clouds? Well, the White Horse, at any moment, could go blowing over the round side of the earth, beyond pursuit. But with the other ponies it was a different matter.

They had left the entanglements of the badlands, now, and the sweeping prairie was before them. And as the dawn grew, the condition of the horses could be studied. They were very far spent, indeed. Their heads were down; their backs were beginning to roach up, and their bellies to pinch; all sure signs of exhaustion. Moreover, their fierce eyes were beginning to dull.

They came to a wandering rivulet, and there Rusty ordered a halt to let the horses drink a little. Not enough to weight them down; only time enough to loosen the girths for a few moments, and so perhaps give the ponies new heart.

But when they mounted again, the far tremble of the dog chorus was drawing nearer, across the green waves of the prairies, and the horses, as they trotted forward, had little more life than before.

Rusty drew up again.

"There is only one way," he said. "Two of us must face the danger; two of us may escape. Broken Arrow and Little Porcupine, draw away to the right. I go with my white brother, to

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the left. If I am lost, give your hands to Standing Bull. He is my friend of friends.—Farewell! Go quickly!"

So they split into two parties, and gave up all hope of making a real battle. Four armed men may fight against numbers. Two men are soon lost.

But as they parted, the four men looked at one another with eyes that went deep. In turn, the two Cheyennes took big Bill Tenney's hand. Then Broken Arrow bowed his head before Rusty.

"Father, pray for us!" he said in his own tongue.

Rusty looked up, and raised both hands to the sky.

"You behold us, Sweet Medicine," he said. "Give us the thing that is in your heart."

After that, they divided. The two Cheyennes were soon lost over the wavering green. And from the rear, the noise of the dogs came gradually beating, nearer and nearer.

"ARE they follerin' the Injuns, or are they takin' after us?" asked Bill Tenney anxiously.

Rusty shook his head, and continued to listen.

"They are following us," he said, finally.

"Damn them!" groaned Bill Tenney. "And damn a short-legged worthless runt of a hoss like this here!"

He beat the mustang as he spoke, but the pony failed to rock into a responsive gallop. Instead, it stumbled heavily, fell to a walk, and then raised a mere dog-trot. Its sides were heaving bellows. Its nostrils could not widen enough to take in enough of the life-giving air.

"We are ended, brother," said Rusty, calmly, as he halted the White Horse.

Bill Tenney stared at him with wild eyes for a minute. Then he jerked the mustang to a halt, in turn, and flung himself out of the saddle. A jerk on the reins, and the heavy thrust of his shoulder forced the pony to lie down.

"If they get me, they're gonna pay for me—and pay damn big!" shouted Tenney.

He shook his fist toward the increasing chorus of the dogs.

"They're gonna pay blood for blood, damn their rotten hearts!" he shouted.

Rusty slipped from the White Horse. He stood with his arm around the head of the great stallion, and absently stroked the face of the horse. Then he said:

"This day is my day, brother. It was your day when the river was taking me. It was taking the White Horse, also. As you drew him safely to the shore, so he will carry you away from danger now. Take him, friend!"

He smiled as he spoke. Bill Tenney, staring, could see no bitterness in his companion's face.

"You're talkin', partner," said Tenney. He began to breathe like a man who has been running with all his might for a great distance. "You don't mean what you say.—Besides, how would I be takin' your hoss and ridin' off? How would I—?"

Here the beauty and the glory of the stallion filled his eye and his soul, and silenced him to a gasp.

"One day," said Rusty, "Sweet Medicine will be kind to me again. He will bring me back to you and the White Horse, and then I shall take him.—Take him now. Take him quickly, because they are coming close. And I must tell the White Horse that you are a friend, or else he will not carry you."

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The noise of the dogs, creeping closer and closer, made a riot in Bill Tenney's brain. He seemed to see a campfire, with men seated around it, and he seemed to hear a deep man's voice saying:

"And this here hound—this gent called Tenney—he takes the hoss that his partner offers him, and he just rides off and leaves Rusty Sabin alone to be grabbed. And the soldiers, they sure murdered Sabin, after they got hold of him!"

"Quick!" urged Rusty.

HERE a thin trickle of tired looking dogs came over the crest of a low, green wave of prairieland; and behind them rode the heads and shoulders, the horses of several riders. Thirty men were soon cantering on that trail!

"My God, they've got me!" groaned Tenney, and he flung himself hastily into the saddle.

Under him the stallion crouched low; and when that set of lithe steel springs reacted, Tenney knew that he would be hurled into the sky. Good rider that he was, he knew that he could not sit half a minute on the frantic back of the White Horse. But a few words from Rusty made the big horse stand straight again. He turned his head, blowing his breath, shining his angry eyes at Tenney, till Rusty took the man's hand and laid it on the stallion's face.

"Be to him as you are to me," said Rusty.

As a child speaks to an animal—a child not sophisticated enough to believe that beasts have no understanding—so Rusty spoke to the stallion.

Out of the distance they heard the dim shouting of men who saw, at last, the prey they had toiled for so long.

"Take him easily," said Rusty. "Speak to him a great deal. He will serve you now, and carry you. Start now, brother."

He held up his hand, and Bill Tenney seized it with a frantic grasp.

"I'm wrong," said Tenney. "I shouldn't do it. I'm a hound.—But—my God! What'd they do to me if they got me a second time?—Rusty—so long!—Good-bye.—God bless you!"

He turned the stallion. The White Horse made a few steps; then he halted, looking back toward his master. But a shout that came cheerfully out of Rusty's throat made the big animal break into a canter; a gallop; a racing stride that kept the chunks of turf dancing in the air about his head like little flying birds. Rusty watched him going like a streak that diminished in size; then the wavering surface of the prairie covered him from view.

From the other direction, the beating hoofs of the many horses thundered down upon him; and before them the dogs strained forward in full cry. He looked down at the mustang, which still lay as if dead on the ground.

Bill Tenney had intended to use that living breastwork and fight from behind it, forgetting that he could be surrounded and picked off from the rear. But Rusty had no intention even of making resistance. He was not good with a rifle; he never had been good. Indians are not famous marksmen with firearms, although among the Cheyennes there were always plenty of warriors who could surpass Rusty with firearms of all sorts. And so the White Indian simply faced the advancing charge; and with his eyes he selected the form of Major Marston, riding first of all.

Far to the rear there appeared other horses—undoubtedly the reserve herd

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out of which the major would have remounted his men, if the goal had not been reached. But what would he do now? To follow the White Horse would be an act of perfect folly. The two Cheyennes were gone far away, and were beyond pursuit. And out of four men there remained only one for the major's wrath to consume.

Then the dogs came in, leaping furiously at Rusty. He shouted and raised his hand, and they shrank to either side of the human quarry. And there was the major, towering above him on horseback; reining his excited, tired horse; glaring down at the calm face of Rusty.

THE soldiers, too, were sweeping up. A voice from a young lieutenant called:

"Shall we go on, sir?"

"Go on after what?" snarled the major. "After a streak of lightning?—Don't be a damned fool, Wells."

Lieutenant Wells strained his eyes at the point, far away, where a dissolving point of white could still be seen. He made no answer, for it was plain that they might as well try to catch birds out of the sky with their bare hands as to hunt for the White Horse.

"You weren't man enough to keep your horse, eh?" said the major to Rusty. "You let him take your horse away from you, eh?—That's what he is, eh? The fellow whose hide you saved?"

But a sergeant broke in to say, "There wasn't no fight, sir. I seen it all. He just give Tenney his horse. He give him the stallion. I watched, and I seen him standin' at the head of the hoss. I never seen nothin' like it!"

"Keep still!" commanded the major, angrily.

It would have been better the other way. It would have been a great deal better to take Rusty Sabin back to the fort and spread word that, like a coward, he had permitted his companion to take away the horse by force. But this thing of voluntarily giving up so famous a stallion, would it not make Rusty even more of a hero than ever, in the mind of Maisry Lester?

Aye, and in the minds of all the other men in Fort Marston, too. That was why the major glowered as he sat the saddle and stared down at Rusty Sabin. Quick and keen as his mind was, he did not know at once how he would be able to handle Rusty to the best advantage. But in his very soul there was an iron determination to wring out of Rusty enough wretchedness to make up for the shame which the major had endured the night before.

He could not see his way clear. There were legal methods, of course; but his own methods would be more to his personal taste. He had the desire to raise his quirt and slash Rusty across the face with it, right now. He wanted to flog this blacksmith all the way back to the fort.

Instead, he merely forced himself to smile, and commanded that for the return march the captive be mounted between two of the troopers.

CHAPTER XII.

DECEPTIONS.

THAT bitter quandary kept the major's mind employed all during the long, slow march back to the fort. It was the position in which Rusty stood that baffled him.

The major, it is necessary to make clear, was a man who never gave up an objective, once he had settled upon it.

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And as a goal the winning of Maisry Lester was more firmly established in his mind than anything else ever had been. It was so deeply rooted in him that her name moved in his very blood. All that was simple and gentle and beautiful in the world was represented to the major by the girl. It seemed as though the very evil in him craved her because she was his opposite.

Now he had Rusty Sabin in his hands, but if he wreaked his wrath on Rusty, the girl would never forgive him, no matter how he cloaked his proceedings in the name of justice.

He heard one of the soldiers behind him saying to Rusty, at one moment:

"That was a damned fine, crazy thing you done to-day, Sabin!"

Every man on the frontier would say the same thing. Rusty faced years of imprisonment, for the crimes of entering a federal building by force, for an assault upon a United States officer, and for forcibly interfering with the course of Federal justice. Any one of three crimes would be enough to lodge him in prison for a long term. The three combined were enough to put him in darkness for almost all the rest of his days.

But if this were done, the girl would never be able to look upon Major Marston without pain. And therefore the thing had to be managed in another way. Obscurely, the major's good brains worked on the problem. In some way, he was sure, he ought to be able to arrange the affair so that he could seem to give Rusty the advantage; so that the major himself might appear really as a benefactor to the young man. By so doing, his reputation would be sweetened in the eyes of the girl, and a vast step forward in that direction would be made.

For a long time the plan was nebulous before Marston's searching brain; but little by little, during the long march, it gained in clarity.

IT was toward the evening when they drew near Fort Marston and saw the big, square shoulders of the building rising. The major never saw that outline lift without feeling that it spoke the name "Marston" in a voice whose vibrations could be sensed around the world—"Marston," a word that meant big and powerful and enduring.

Fort Marston would become a city one day, the major hoped and believed. The railroads would come out here, bringing wealth and noise and soot, and people would pool around Fort Marston and make the name of its founder immortal. No matter how occupied his mind might be, there was a smile on his lips as he saw the gross, formidable outlines of the fort growing up out of the plain.

He sent riders on fresh horses ahead of him. He sent a special messenger to inform the Lester family that Rusty Sabin was "safe in the hands of Major Marston." If Maisry had half a brain—and she had a whole one—she would be able to interpret that as a message from a friend; one who would intercede between justice and her lover.

The whole maneuver that followed would be complicated; difficult in the extreme. But he would manage it.

Some of the difficulties began to appear when the cortege entered the town, for the entire population of Fort Marston, as a matter of course, had heard about the return from the advance riders. They knew the entire story of what had happened by now, and they thronged the way. There were no cheers for the soldiery; there were

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simply multitudes of shouts for Rusty Sabin.

"Good lad!" screeched an old woman as she ran out from the others and followed along at the side of Rusty for a few steps. "A better or a finer thing wasn't never done. You'll be teachin' brutes how to make themselves into men!—More power to you, Rusty Sabin!"

And all who heard this shouted and cheered Rusty.

The major wanted to curse, but he made himself smile. He was pale with rage, but he kept that smile enduring like one cut in rock. He hated these townsmen.

Then he saw the Lesters in front of their house, the father and the daughter close together, the mother at a little distance from them. It would have pleased Mrs. Lester well enough, the major knew, if Rusty had been thrown into jail for life. Anything to prevent the marriage of her daughter with a half wild man. But the anxious, tense faces of Richard Lester and his daughter told the major how keenly they were suffering.

Well, if all went as he planned, he would have her for his own, one day. And more than once she would stand like that, with just that face of suffering, waiting for his return. Good women, the major felt, always love where they should love. If only a man can wangle the marriage, everything else follows as a matter of course. And a girl like Maisry Lester—why, she would as soon deny her God as her husband!

These were Major Marston's thoughts as he got Rusty Sabin inside the fort and had him placed in the guard room. When he looked at Rusty's manacled hands, he wanted to hang the man by them from the high walls of the fort, but he made his tone gentler as he said:

"I must pursue certain courses, in order to fill out my duty to the law, but I intend well by you, Sabin. You'll be surprised before the end, by what I intend to do for you."

AFTER that, he went straight as a homing pigeon to the Lester house. Maisry, standing straight and still in a corner of the room, turned a white face toward him and could not speak. Richard Lester had his face bowed in his hands. Only Mrs. Lester was at ease, and almost florid in her talk.

"It's a good day for this town when you took charge of things, major!" she told Marston. "There'll be an end of the scalawags and the wild men. The decent people are going to have a chance to call their souls their own, and to lead their own lives."

But the major got to Maisry at once, saying, "I want to speak to you in the next room, Maisry. I have something important to tell you."

She showed him into the next room. It was a storage place, with sacks of flour on the floor, hams and bacons hanging up from the low ceiling, and various barrels and boxes of dried meat and fruit, for the Lesters were buying during the cheap season, in order to have supplies for the next winter. They sat down close together on a pair of boxes. The girl had a look of one in church, during a funeral service for a dead friend.

The major said, "This is a serious business, in a way; and yet it's a business to laugh about also. To begin with, I've grown mighty fond of Rusty, during the trip in from the place where we caught him."

"Fond of him?" breathed Maisry,

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looking up suddenly, a shadow of disbelief in her clear eyes.

"Well, he was pretty scared when we came sweeping up," said the major. "Seemed to think that we were going to eat him. And as we came back toward the fort, I talked to him a lot. The fact is, he's a simple fellow. There's no real harm in him. I like him. I like him so much that I've told him I want to do what I can to help him out. And what do you think he asked me to do?"

She shook her head. She seemed dazed when the major talked of the kindly feeling he had for Rusty.

"Why," went on Marston, laughing a little and touching his mustache with the tips of his fingers, as though to make sure that it was there, "why, he's a bit superstitious, you know. He feels he's had all this bad luck—lost the White Horse and put himself in prison, so to speak—all because he gave up his luck. And do you know where he thinks his luck centers? In that green beetle that he gave you!"

The major laughed again, but the girl, startled, drew the little scarab from the bosom of her dress and fingered it anxiously.

"HE asked me to beg you to send it back," said the major, casually.

"But he couldn't have done that!" exclaimed Maisry. "Of course he couldn't have done that. You were in the room, Arthur, when he gave it to me. You heard him tell me never to send it to him unless I wanted to be rid of him."

"Well, that's true; I remember the scene perfectly well," answered Marston. "I wonder if that's really in his mind? I never thought of that. I wonder if he really wants to be free from you again?"

"Free—from me?" said Maisry, turning white again.

She looked away from the major, envisaging disaster. The major went on in a tone of gentle sympathy:

"I don't know. But I suppose it's the wild life calling him back again. Towns are too small to hold red Indians; too small for white Indians, either, I suppose."

She was rigid. Her lips were purple-gray.

"And then, I dare say, he feels his luck *is* wrapped up in the green beetle," went on the major. "You know, the Indians have their medicine bags, and they think their souls are sewed up inside the leather. And—"

"Don't!" breathed Maisry.

She took the green beetle from around her neck and made a gesture to give it to the major; but catching her hands back again, she pressed the little scarab between them, close to her breast.

"If he's asked for it, it means that he doesn't want to see me again," said Maisry miserably. "Or else it's because he expects to spend all his life in prison—"

"Not that," answered Marston. "I've told him that after all I'm going to take the law into my own hands and set him free."

"You are?—To set him free?" said the girl, eagerly.

"I've got to," said the major. "The fact is, Maisry, it makes me sick at heart to see you like this. When I rode past you with Sabin, this evening—and when I saw your white face—I knew that I would have to turn him loose."

"Ah," she said, "how good and how kind you are! How really good and kind!—Then, if I send him the green beetle, he'll have a chance to come to me?"

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"Aye, if he wants to. Of course he'll have the chance," said Marston.

She put the scarab suddenly into the major's hands.

"It seems like giving away life and breath!" she told him, trying to smile.

"But take it to him at once. Tell him that I love him, and that I am waiting for him.—Will you do that for me, major?"

He stood up. There was nothing but blackness in his heart. "Tell him? Of course I'll tell him," he lied.

He crushed the scarab with the grip of his fingers, and felt as if he were squeezing Rusty Sabin's very heart.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Spinning Cotton by Mouse-Power

EVEN a mouse may earn its keep and yield a profit to man, if given the opportunity. In these days of progress in labor saving it might be worth while for some one to try the experiment suggested by the man who first used mouse-power. He was an ingenious Scotchman by the name of David Hutton, a native of Dunfermline, where he erected a small mill in 1820, in which mice supplied the power.

Hutton came upon the idea in the summer of 1812, while visiting in Perth. He was inspecting the toys and trinkets that were manufactured by the French prisoners in the depot there, when his attention was attracted by a little toy-house with a wheel in the gable of it that was running rapidly around, propelled by the gravity of a common house mouse.

For one shilling he purchased the house, mouse, and wheel and on his journey homeward he was compelled to contemplate the mouse's favorite amusement. But how to apply half an ounce of power (which is the weight of a mouse) to a useful purpose was the difficulty.

Though Hutton proved that an ordinary mouse would average a run of ten and half miles a day, he had one mouse which ran the remarkable distance of eighteen miles in that time. A half penny's worth of oatmeal was sufficient for its food for thirty-five days, during which time it ran three hundred and sixty-two miles.

For a year, he kept two mice constantly engaged in spinning sewing thread. This thread-mill was so constructed that the mouse was able to twist, twine, and reel from 100 to 120 threads a day, Sundays not excepted. To perform this task it had to run ten and a half miles a day, which it did with perfect ease every other day. On the half penny's worth of oatmeal, which lasted for five weeks, one of these little mice made 3,350 threads twenty-five inches long, and as a penny was paid to women for every hank made in the ordinary way, the mouse at that rate earned eighteen cents every six weeks.

Allowing for board and for machinery, there was a clear yearly profit from each mouse of one dollar and fifty cents. It was Hutton's intention to apply for the loan of the Dunfermline Cathedral, which was empty, where he planned to set up ten thousand mouse mills and still leave room for the keepers and several hundreds of spectators; but this wonderful project was never carried out because of the inventor's sudden death.

Kenneth P. Wood.

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"Hooray, I win the radio!"

Cappers

By JOHN H. THOMPSON

There's one born every minute, drifters Bill and Jim knew, but they hadn't counted themselves

"GIMME three balls; I'll try a shot. Come on, folks, watch me trim this geezer."

Bill's airy confidence was well founded. As a capper he was due to win the big prize.

He rolled the balls down the numbered incline. The first ball missed, as it was supposed to. The second also missed, and the crowd hooted in sympathetic glee.

Then he rolled the third. It tottered on the edge of the hole marked with the red star and was drawn in irresistibly.

"Hooray, I win the twenty dollar radio set," shouted Bill for the benefit of the audience.

"That's the sixth radio set I've lost on this board to-day," groaned the concessionist with well simulated grief.

The crowd was impressed. They didn't know, of course, that Bill had been the winner of each of the six radio sets—or rather the six-time winner of the one radio set.

"Twenty dollars for ten cents. Pretty soft!" Bill tucked the radio set under his arm.

"Be careful not to scratch it. I can't afford to buy another one this season," whispered the concessionist warningly.

He turned to the crowd. "Come on, gents. I'm going to close up here pretty quick; everybody seems to be winning

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big prizes to-day. Three balls for ten cents. Come on."

And as the suckers came, Bill and I slipped out through the crowd to await our chance to duck behind the tent so the radio set could be placed on duty again.

"I've got to win it only two more times and then we collect our three dollars from Joe and call it a day's work," he chuckled.

"You hadn't ought to have told Joe that we had ten dollars," I remarked to Bill. "Joe hates like blazes to give any money to a guy that already has some."

"He doesn't get the radio set back until I have my hands on the three iron men," chuckled Bill reassuringly. "I don't trust that guy. 'Cash or a squawk' is the rule of all good cappers—and I'm one of the best. Nobody can—"

Bill paused. A gaunt looking stranger who had been lingering on the edge of the crowd had tapped him on the arm.

Bill ducked, but his alarm was unnecessary.

"My friend, do you realize that you've been gambling?" demanded the stranger.

"Oh, no, I haven't," retorted Bill emphatically.

The stranger chuckled. "Come over here a minute," he directed.

"Wait'll I get rid of this radio set," said Bill.

"No; bring it with you," said the stranger.

HE led the way across the carnival grounds to a small concession booth at the far end.

"This is my concession," he informed us. "But I haven't been getting the crowd. I need a big, flashy prize. I've got a proposition to make. Lend me that radio set and—"

"That's out," interposed Bill emphatically. "It ain't mine. It belongs to—to—a friend," he finished at bit lamely.

"Don't bother trying to kid me, brother," chuckled the stranger. "I've been in this carnival game too long. I have been watching you cap for Joe, over there."

"But—"

"Now, just listen a minute. I'm giving you a chance to double your profits. Here's the dope: each time you win that radio set over at Joe's concession, you hurry over here with it. Then you win it here and hurry back to Joe's. Get the idea?"

Bill got it all right, but I didn't notice him flinging his arms around the philanthropist.

"We'd be in the devil of a mess if we lost the set over here," I interposed. "Who'd break the sad news to Joe? He's been losing that radio set twenty times a day all season. It's the handle on his bread basket, as it were."

"This outfit of mine is a sure thing. It works just like Joe's—a magnet under number ten hole—you can't lose," said the stranger reassuringly. "Come on, help a fellow out. You're not taking any chances—and I pay you half a dollar each time you put the set up."

Bill hesitated. "Pay in advance?"

"In advance," said the stranger reassuringly.

He handed Bill a half dollar, grabbed the radio set, ducked behind his counter, placed it in a conspicuous place on the shelf, and started ballyhooing.

"Joe'll be burning up, if we don't hurry back," groaned Bill. "Make it speedy."

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The leather-lunged concessionist called the attention of the passing crowd to the radio set dominating the cheaper prizes on his shelf. Two or three stopped to look.

"Come on, folks, three shots for a dime. You may win a twenty dollar radio set for ten cents." The raucous cry boomed out, and I was glad that Joe's concession booth was located at the other end of the grounds.

"Gimme three balls, I'll try a shot," shouted Bill. "Come on, folks. Watch me trim this geezer."

A dozen or more spectators were now grouped in front of the booth.

"A twenty dollar radio set for a dime. If this stranger wins it, there's another waiting to be unpacked for the next lucky person. I'll keep putting 'em up as long as you keep winning them," lied the ballyhoo artist cheerfully.

Bill shot the first ball. It missed. Likewise the second. My hands felt clammy as the third rolled down the numbered incline. It tottered on the edge of the starred hole and for a minute it looked as though it was going to continue on.

Was the gaunt stranger going to double cross us?

He didn't. The ball rolled into the hole.

"Look't that. He pays ten cents and wins a twenty dollar radio set. Come on, folks. I've got another like it right here under the counter. If you get a ball in that hole you win a twenty dollar radio set."

Dimes rattled down on his counter.

BILL grabbed the radio set and we sped across the grounds to Joe's place and slipped it under the back end of the canvas.

"It's time you got back," grumbled Joe angrily as we sauntered around to the front. "The crowd's drifting away. Do your stuff. Just because you guys have got a roll of your own, you're lying down on your job."

"Aw, shut up," snapped Bill testily. He flung down a dime, picked up three balls, and went through the familiar rigmarole, culminating in the handing over of the much-traveled radio set. Its companion on the shelf was just an empty box—a plant.

"There you are, folks. That's the way everybody wins prizes at this tent. Seven of 'em I've lost this afternoon. Who's going to be number eight?"

Bill and I could have answered the question, but of course we didn't.

The come-on game worked as usual; and Bill and I sped back across the grounds to the other tent. We got there just in time, as the crowd was thinning out.

"Slip me a half a buck and the set goes under the flop in back," whispered Bill.

Bill doesn't believe in taking any chances. He got his half.

"Just a minute, folks. You seem to think I'm kidding you. I've got another of those twenty dollar radio sets to give you for a dime. Just a minute, I'll unpack it. I've got a dozen of 'em here."

The gaunt stranger stooped down, and a minute later the familiar radio set was back on the shelf.

"Gimme three balls," ordered Bill.

I was about to draw Bill's attention to something, but it was too late; the first ball already was rolling down the incline. He'd have to finish, but this would be the last time we'd try to win the radio set at this booth. Perhaps everything was O. K., but there was no use in climbing into a patrol wagon for a trip to jail.

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It was a blonde that was worrying me. If she had not been so doggoned blonde I might not have spotted her, but as soon as I saw her edging toward the back of the booth I remembered having seen her here before and also in the interim at Joe's. She was following us around. A female dick, probably.

She had disappeared from sight momentarily and I hoped that Bill would win the radio and that we could get away before she reappeared.

Two balls had descended the incline and the third was on its way.

"What in thunder?" gasped Bill in angry dismay.

The third ball had curved around the winning hole and rolled into a "blank" at the foot of the incline.

"You're a double crossing—" Bill began, but it was obvious that the gaunt stranger was as much surprised as was Bill.

"It's O. K., partner," he whispered to Bill. "I'm no double crosser. Just a minute and I'll find out what's wrong."

He held the crowd with his ballyhoo as he fumbled with the board. As he disappeared momentarily from view, Bill took up the refrain. Bill's a good capper.

"Come on," he shouted for the benefit of the audience. "I'm going to win that radio set—that twenty dollar radio set—for ten cents." His voice shook a bit.

I knew what he was thinking about, because I was thinking about the same thing—what would Joe say if we didn't retrieve the radio set.

THE stranger had straightened up. "It's O. K. now, I think," he whispered. "Somebody tampered with the wires or else one of them was pulled off as you shoved the set under the canvas. Shoot now."

"Gimme three more balls, I'm going to win," shouted Bill. "I'm—"

"Just a minute, big boy. I come next." The bleached blonde, appearing from nowhere in particular, elbowed Bill aside and picked up three balls.

I shivered apprehensively.

Bill gaped at her, and he was still gaping as the ball slid down the incline, teetered at the edge of winning hole and then dropped in.

"The radio set is mine," screeched the blonde.

"Wait a minute—wait a minute—" The gaunt stranger seemed dazed.

"Give me my radio set; I won it," insisted the blonde. "Didn't I win it?" She turned to the crowd for confirmation—and got the confirmation, all right.

"But—"

"Give the little lady her radio set—we all saw her win it fair and square," snapped a tough-looking bruiser.

He won a dazzling smile and was encouraged to redouble his efforts.

"Give her the radio set or I'll knock your block off," he said threateningly.

The gaunt stranger looked at Bill in dismay, but Bill was speechless with horror.

The bruiser showed impatience. "Give her—"

"All right, buddy, keep your coat on," said the concessionist hurriedly. He handed the radio set—Joe's pet radio set—to the blonde.

"Holy mackerel," groaned Bill as she departed in triumph.

"We've got to follow her and get the danged thing back," I whispered to Bill. "Joe'll tear us to pieces."

We pushed through the crowd in the wake of the blonde.

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"Say, lady," said Bill as we overtook her. "We—"

"It's my radio set—I won it," she snapped. "You're not going to get it away from me. Unless you buy it," she added.

Bill mopped perspiration off his brow with a shaking hand.

"Offer to buy it," I whispered. "Anything—but get the blasted thing back."

"I'll give you five dollars for it," offered Bill hoarsely.

"Five dollars, big boy—five dollars for a twenty dollar radio set?" The blonde laughed derisively.

"I'll give you ten," said Bill eagerly. He was shooting the works.

"Ten? O. K. Sold."

We sighed in chorus as the ten dollars disappeared into a capacious handbag—but the radio set was safe under Bill's arm.

We hastened over to Joe's tent.

Joe grumbled angrily over our delay, but we won the radio for the eighth time and collected our three dollars.

Then we drifted over to the other concessionaire's.

HE looked as though he would have liked to fade through the back of the booth when he spotted us. "I'm sorry, boys, honest I am," he whispered. "I can't understand how that happened. Somebody who knew how these boards operate must have tampered with it when I wasn't looking."

"That's the devil of a note," growled Bill. "Where in thunder do we get off?"

"What did Joe say? You didn't tell him I was using his radio set, did you?" demanded the stranger.

"Joe didn't say anything—he didn't know nothing about it," said Bill.

The concessionaire looked relieved at that.

"But we had to pay ten dollars to get the set back from that blonde," said Bill. "And I think it's up to you to make good."

"I haven't got ten dollars," confessed the other. "I'd give it to you in a minute if I had."

Bill and I were skeptical.

"I've got a conscience," declared the concessionaire virtuously. "I tell you what I'll do."

He fingered the money in his cash box. "I've got about seven dollars. I'll split it with you."

He did have something that would pass for a conscience, at that. We had figured the ten dollars was a total loss, so we were grateful to receive three and a half.

"I'd like to know who in thunder tampered with that board," remarked the concessionaire resentfully as he handed over the money.

It was supper time and the carnival grounds were almost deserted. Bill and I sauntered over toward the hot-dog tent and, *en route,* ran almost head-on into Joe.

Joe was not alone, and he tried to avoid us, but it was too late.

"You two bums were trying to play me double this afternoon, eh?" he sneered defensively, a mocking grin on his face.

But the insult passed unnoticed.

"Who's your friend, Joe?" demanded Bill.

"Oh, yes—I forgot—meet my wife, boys," said Joe.

And we found ourselves nodding coldly to a blonde—the doggoned blond blonde.

THE END

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Adams carried the wounded girl into the shade

Jungle Girl

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

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Fabulous treasure and lurking dangers await Frank Adams in a ruined city of Siam's wilderness

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WHEN Frank Adams, the young American, landed in Bangkok, Siam, he received a cold reception from his uncle, Col. Kephard, wild animal collector, of whom he asked a job. Col. Kephard's estimation of Frank went up suddenly, though, when the young American fulfilled a seemingly impossible task set for him.

The uncle asked Frank to procure a sacred white elephant. With the help of the Flying Cohen, a free lance aviator, Frank did just that—and put himself in danger of immediate arrest.

To keep the two adventurers out of jail, Col. Kephard sent them to the interior of Siam on another seemingly hopeless task: to find the daughter of Hugh Cabot, a white man who had been a captive of the natives for many years and had recently escaped. The girl, Lana, had not been seen since she was a child.

Flying into the jungle, Frank and Cohen located ancient ruins and the grave of the girl's mother. Before they could find the girl they met three escaped convicts, Dubois, Fraser and Harris, and after a fight Frank and Cohen were left for dead.

This story began in the Argosy for March 10

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Frank being badly injured, Cohen, who was too weak to carry him, staggered back to his plane and set off to bring aid. Frank came out of his delirium to find himself being cared for by the half-wild, beautiful Lana, who spoke a few words of English and had gained the confidence of Khan, an elephant, and Dak, a monkey.

In one of the ruins was a large hoard of gold coins, and Frank knew that Dubois was seeking them. One night the sound of a gun warned the American that the convicts were near, and the next day Harris appeared and shot Lana. Frank is telling the story.

CHAPTER VII.

FLIGHT.

IN the ensuing moments the vision of Lana, shot down by this white brute, governed all I did. By the fraction of an instant, I had been too late to save her from his bullet. And the consequences of that bullet were to be far-reaching and dire.

I dropped Harris in his tracks with my first shot.

Unfortunately, I hit him low and did not kill him at once. He came to one knee and brought up his rifle; as he did so I fired again. His bullet actually burned across my ribs without breaking the skin—but mine finished him, and he sprawled down in the grass.

This diversion had given his native hunter time to get into action. The Achin made a dash for the nearest tree, then dropped suddenly to cover and let fly at me. Although I was standing out in the open, the man missed me clean, and I put two swift bullets into his position. He uttered a piercing scream, leaped high in the air like a wounded deer, and then fell back out of sight in the grass.

"So much for you both, you devils!" I muttered.

A swift glance around showed me no others in sight. Harris, beyond doubt, had been accompanied by only the one hunter.

Swiftly I made my way to where Lana lay, and feared the worst when I saw the spreading splotch of crimson over her side. Something very like panic seized me as I knelt beside her—then I uttered a cry of joy. As though this recalled her to life, she opened her eyes, smiled at me, and fell unconscious again.

The bullet had struck her in the thigh, but, by the greatest of fortunes, had missed the bone and gone clean through. No artery was pierced, but the wound was severe enough; I knew she would be off her feet for a time, though she would probably recover more quickly than most, thanks to her rugged constitution and hardy life.

Darting to the body of Harris, I stripped off his shirt. With this I hurried back and contrived a bandage for Lana's wound, lifted and carried her into the shade at the edge of the trees, then lit my last cigarette. I had to think and act quickly, make no mistakes—for now I knew that time pressed.

Those shots would be heard. Dubois would spare no effort to find Harris—and that meant an immediate change of base.

For us, the House of the Tevadas was finished.

I strode out with the intention of getting the rifles and cartridges from my two victims. The body of Harris yielded unexpected and most welcome loot — cigarettes, a bandolier of cartridges, a watch, safety matches, and, best of all, a small pocket-case holding bandages and iodine. Securing these, and his rifle, I turned to get the weapon from the Achin hunter. I came to the spot where he had fallen—

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No body was there.

Astonishment seized upon me, then swift consternation. The man was gone. Blood on the grass showed that I had scored a hit; but he was gone, and had taken his rifle along. He was not, therefore, even seriously hurt. Saving himself by the old trick of playing dead, he had sneaked off through the grass.

FOR a moment I considered following him, then decided against it. That would be folly; I would only be shot down if I did come up with him. He had sneaked off to regain the camp of Dubois, wherever that might be, and it was up to me to take advantage of the slight delay involved.

It would not be long before I had the whole troop of them after me—and with Lana helpless, I had a man's job in sight.

I fell to work like a madman. Gathering up the weapons and cartridges, I ran—Lord, how I ran! Plunging off amid the trees into the jungle, yet trying to leave no trail. Then, depositing the rifles and other things, back again to the clearing. Here I paused to pour some iodine into Lana's wound, but the bitter sting of it did not waken her.

Replacing the bandage, I lifted her and staggered off again, and so left her with the rifles.

Then back again. Dashing into the House of the Tevadas over the stiff corpse of the male tiger, I secured a few things of which we would have immediate need; her bow and some arrows, gourds for water, whatever I could seize most quickly. I still went hot and cold at thought of how Harris had deliberately shot her down—this glorious creature whom a glance must have told him was a white girl, and no enemy. Well, the brute had paid for his deviltry. This was my only consolation.

YES, Dubois would come. He would find Harris—and he would find the gold strewn about in the house. No help for it now, however. Worst of all, he would put those accursed native hunters to trailing us. And how, burdened with Lana and these other things, was I to throw them off? Where, indeed, could I take her?

When, with my load, I came in sight of where Lana lay, she was just beginning to stir. Dak, the monkey, was pawing her, whimpering and staring at me with a comically worried look—and no wonder!

She rolled over, sat up, uttered a sharp cry of pain, and sank back again, her blue eyes fastened upon me in pitiful wonder and agony. No further complaint escaped her, however. She saw the bandage, tested her hurt leg, and, with a grimace, looked up at me. Then the shadow of her old gay smile touched her lips.

"No time to lose, Lana," I said, knowing that she comprehended a good deal of my speech without knowing the actual words. "They'll be after us in no time. Where can we go? The House of the Tevadas is finished for us. You'll be laid up for a bit. Can we hide out in the House of the Dead?"

She got some of my meaning at least, for quick fear glinted in her eyes and she shook her head in vehement dissent. The sight of my loads told her that a migration was under way.

"No! No, Frank! House of the Dead bad, very bad!" she exclaimed. "Where?"

"That's what I'm asking you," I said. "Dubois will be on our trail like a shot."

She knew the name of Dubois, from

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the picture I had drawn on the stone wall. Probably Dubois would find it there himself, now. I repressed a grim smile at the thought.

"Come!" she said abruptly, and held out her hand to me. I helped her up. She tried to walk, but it was out of the question. I put one of the two rifles into her hand, then picked her up. Her arm went around my neck, and we were all set. She pointed out the way to me, and we started, with Dak frisking along overhead.

"Bad man gone, Frank?" she inquired.

"Gone? You bet he is," I said, and laughed. "Gone good and proper, too! Where are we heading for? Another house of these dead and gone folk?"

"House of the Dead? No! Bad!" she returned with emphasis. "House of—of Khan."

"Khan's house? Oh, you mean some house with an elephant on it, maybe! Sure, I suppose these Khmers had elephant stables somewhere on the premises," I said cheerfully. "Well, if they think they're going to chase us from one of these ruined temples to another, they'll have another think coming. I'm going to take a hand in this dirty work myself. Hello! Does our road lie this way?"

She nodded to my look of inquiry, and I halted.

We had crossed an open glade, and ahead of us was a straight, wide causeway of stones that struck off and was lost to sight among the trees to our left. Here, at least, it was perfect as the day it was made, unhampered by trees and largely unbroken. Farther on, of course, it would go into ruins, but just now it was the very thing I most wanted to see.

I had not attempted to cover up our trail. Such attempts would have been useless; the keen eyes of those native hunters would pick up the trail anywhere in the jungle. But on this stone road it would be lost, completely lost, if I used a little care. And there were the bandoliers and other things to fetch up. I could bring them all at one load, with luck.

"Wait," I told Lana, then turned and retraced my way. From here, at least, I could not lose the back trail, for we had not come half a mile.

HOW far we would have to go before reaching the place she had in mind was highly problematical. These forgotten cities of the ancient Khmers, who had all been wiped out in some great cataclysm of plague or war as yet unknown to history, were laid out on a vast scale. Each mighty temple alone might cover hundreds of acres; for in the temple grounds lived the priests and other attendants, whose number ran high into the thousands.

When one thinks of dozens of such temples alone, not to mention palaces and general city buildings, a faint conception may be had of the space taken up by a city of the ancient Khmer people. Also, one may get the idea of what Frank Adams was up against at the moment. However, I was tough, and I have noticed that whenever emergency hits us, if we have the right stuff we can usually rise to the occasion and achieve the impossible.

"And all the time," I reflected, none too happily, "we're getting farther and farther away—in case the Flying Cohen returns."

However, I had about ceased to repose any hopes in the Flying Cohen. I had no time to waste thinking about the future.

On the way back I took my bearings

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pretty closely. Reaching the general plunder, I went on past and took a last look at the House of the Tevadas. No sign yet of the enemy, so I went back and bundled up the stuff and then set out to rejoin Lana. I took a different way, in order to leave a separate trail, and, thanks to my bearings, did not miss my objective by very far.

Lana, who had already fathomed my idea, pointed to the causeway.

"Naga, Frank!" she exclaimed. "Naga!"

I went on with the load, leaving her there, and none too certain what she meant. However, I presently came in sight of a Naga—one of those gorgeously carven stone snakes, whose huge upreared cobra's head was composed of hundreds of tiny cobras. There I set down the load, for at one side of the Naga was a huge cavity in the causeway which would hide it fairly well. Breaking into a run, I retraced my steps and joined Lana again.

"If I had needed exercise I'm getting it," I said, as I slung her up once more. "Good thing you fed me up well, young lady! About three days ago I couldn't have done half of this job. Well, here goes for the next stage."

I was not so cheerful as I pretended to be, however. If I had cherished any illusions about that bunch of ex-convicts, they were gone. We were dealing with wild beasts, not with men.

As we proceeded, the stone road dipped into the jungle again and the going became harder. Now I had to set Lana down and make one more stage, bringing up the stuff left by the Naga, and hiding it among the trees. When I rejoined her I found that Lana had been getting around a bit; the effort had left her white and exhausted, but she had gathered some herbs—by the odor, the same with which she had poulticed me. So I judged she would be able to take care of her wound better than I could. In which I was right.

With all my heart I wanted to be back there at the House of the Tevadas, waiting at the edge of the jungle with a rifle, when Dubois and his outfit arrived. But I could not. The thousand and one things first to be done had left me rather appalled if I stopped to think of them. Lana must be placed in safety and made comfortable, and we must eat. Three simple little things, only three—but how large they bulked! After all, I was still a greenhorn in this new strange world.

On we went. We had covered, I calculated, five or six miles in all. I was beginning to flag; the strength was going out of me. Over the last quarter-mile I staggered, rather than walked, with Lana in my arms. Then our goal was suddenly revealed to me. Two life-sized elephants of stone, their trunks flung high in air, and behind them the massive bulk of a ruinous, carven structure rising amid the trees.

We came up to it and I set Lana down. Before us loomed a magnificent entrance. Lana pointed to one side, and I saw why she had come here; a spring of water trickled out of the ground, fell into a stone basin, and then ebbed away through breaks in the masonry. She knew all this immense expanse of ruins like the palm of her hand, naturally. She had lived her whole life here.

"Water, Frank! Good," she said. I got her a drink, then set to work clearing away some of the rubble at the entry.

NOON found us installed in a gorgeous chamber with a broken roof. It was sculptured with bas-reliefs in which elephants pre-

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dominated; Lana had sure named the place right. As I was clearing out one corner for our own use, I found the head of an ankh or elephant goad—a beautiful thing of chiseled bronze inlaid with gold. I turned it over to Lana, told her to fit a haft in it, and we would use it on Khan.

We were safe, yes. Next came the job of bringing in our extra rifle and other things. After that, the making of a bed on the hard stones—leaves, grass, whatever I could collect. All Lana's old soft skins were lost, of course, except one in which I had bundled up all the small stuff. Then, while she sat by a tiny fire heating water for her herb poultice, I took a rifle and went out to get something to eat.

I was not cut out to be a pot-hunter. After using up most of the afternoon and too many cartridges, I managed to bring in three fat pheasants—not shot on the wing either. They would keep us from starving for a day or so, at least. As soon as they were drawn and on the fire, I dropped down exhausted. I still had to make some sort of barricade for the entry, but three or four dead saplings took care of that.

Thus night came down on us, and ended a disastrous day.

Toward morning I wakened. Lana was sleeping soundly, and without disturbing her I caught up my rifle, boots and knife, and slipped outside. I had given Harris's watch to Lana, causing her all the delight of a child, but the high, thin moonlight told me that dawn was an hour away. Dressed, I hit the trail, which by this time I knew well enough.

After the first mile my stiffness wore off and I made pretty good time. It had occurred to me that Dubois, who no doubt had plenty of looted supplies, must have his base somewhere and would probably shift it to the House of the Tevadas. He, therefore, must have been busy during the day, once his hunters had lost our trail, and this was the time to get in a blow. If he wanted war, he could have it.

Dawn was still some little way off when I worked through the final stretch of jungle, after leaving the stone road, and approached the House of the Tevadas. I could smell the smoke of a fire, and presently caught sight of its flicker. Sure enough they were here. From the edge of the trees I reconnoitered cautiously.

A fire burned near the entrance, from which the tiger's body had disappeared, and there was another out in the clearing. Dubois and his red-haired hellion friend no doubt occupied our own rooms. The size of his outfit, however, surprised and dismayed me. I thought he had only eight or nine men left.

Instead, there appeared to be a dozen men about the fire in the clearing, and seven or eight near the building. Everywhere, in wild confusion, were heaped chop-boxes and supplies of all kinds, just as they had been dropped. Those natives must have been dead beat. Gradually I got the thing figured out. Besides the Achin hunters, Dubois must have a gang of porters—these were probably the men in the clearing. When he looted my uncle's jungle station he had made a good job of it. So, after all, I had only the hunters to fear.

Two of these, I found, were sitting rifle in hand near the fire—and both of these guards were sound asleep!

I considered swiftly. Battle was one thing, assassination was another; accordingly, I left my rifle and crept out. Naturally I had to trust to blind luck, for it was impossible to see any markings or know what the loads contained.

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I shouldered one load and got it safely to cover, and some distance on the back trail.

Then I returned for another.

The two guards were still snoring. I snaked out another load and carried that off to where the first lay, and made my way back to my rifle. As I reached for it, a vine caught my foot and tripped me, and I went sprawling with a crash.

THE two sleeping guards leaped upright, and the rifle of one, which must have been at full cock, exploded. Instantly the whole place was in an uproar, while I lay quiet, watching. Dubois came dashing out, and after him the red-headed Fraser, rifles ready. The oaths and shouts quieted down. Dubois found that the hunter had fired his rifle at nothing, and cursed him in French for a fool. Fraser fell to laughing over the alarm. They little dreamed that I lay fifty feet away with a rifle ready.

Yes, I was tempted; yet I could not bring myself to do it.

"Well," I heard Fraser say, "the camp's waked up now, and dawn is at hand, so we might as well get started for the day, Dubois. Plenty to do. Suit you?"

"Yes," said Dubois, with a growl in his big beard. "Nothing to worry about after all. We know the girl was hit; both of them have cleared out, and they'll leave us alone. These accursed hunters can pick up the lost trail to-day, or suffer for it! I'm going to make one more effort to get into touch with the natives of this district, Fraser. We need guides."

"We'd better do without," said Fraser. "These natives are bad medicine, according to our hunters. That gold can't be far, Dubois. There was so much of it scattered around this place that if we can find the main supply, we could load up our own men and make for the Burmese border."

"Yes, if!" Dubois said savagely. "Well, the girl knows, and so does that rascal with her. Pity we didn't kill the fool when we had our hands on him! Get the men up, will you? I'll locate that box with the liquor."

So saying, Dubois produced a flashlight and started off among the wild confusion of baggage, examining the loads as he went.

Little by little, with many a growling oath, he worked away from the fires and the men. I shifted my position, moving cautiously and managing to make no sound, for I knew the lay of the land hereabouts. Finally I was at the edge of the trees, and he was examining the nearest loads, twenty feet away.

"Dubois," I said, very softly. He straightened up. "Careful! Any alarm and you get a bullet," I went on, pitching my words to reach him but not the others. "Step over here to the trees and keep your hands up. Quick, you fool! Want me to kill you like I did Harris?"

He lifted his arms and came toward me. I could hear his excited, stertorous breathing as he advanced. No one else had heard me, nor was any one paying heed to Dubois. The firelight was flickering up as men threw on more wood, and the camp was stirring, noisy with tongues.

"You damned Englishman! Is it you?" Dubois growled. I laughed cheerfully.

"No; American. Sorry you didn't kill me when you had the chance, eh? You rat! You'd better be sorry. I've got a dozen natives strung out around here, and waiting the word to open up

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on you. Now, do you want to talk business or take a bullet?"

I heard him catch his breath. Personally, he was in a bad fix and knew it.

"Listen, my friend," he said earnestly. "I have nothing against you, nothing. We should not be enemies. You are a good fellow. If you killed Harris—well, it was his own fault for shooting that wild girl. Join our party; we have lots of grub and supplies, and we'll make you rich—rich! There's gold here in this ancient city. You know it; and maybe you know where it comes from, eh?"

I laughed. "Certainly I do, Dubois. Rather, where it came from. You've got all that's left—all the monkeys didn't throw away. It was stored in the building, there. There was a bag full of it, in the ground, and I stored away the whole lot. Well, you can have it; take it and get out, do you understand? I'm sparing your life this time, giving you the one chance. You and your ex-convict friends looted Kephard's stuff, and the government is on your trail right now. Well, what's your answer?"

I flattered myself that I made all this convincing, and I was right. A startled oath broke from Dubois.

"All right," he said hastily, "all right! We're friends, I tell you. Yes, just as soon as we can load up the men we'll be off. Thank you, my friend; you have played fair with me and we will be honest with you. So that is all the gold, eh?"

"Every bit of it," I replied. "And if you want to stop and look for more at the price of war, you can have all you want."

"No, no; *mon Dieu!* We wish only peace," he said, and I felt that he actually meant his words. My talk of natives and of the government had thrown a scare into him.

"Then get going," I said curtly. He obeyed me, and I saw him wiping sweat from his big face as he turned toward the fires.

CHAPTER VIII.

BETRAYED.

SLIPPING off, I got my two loads of stuff to a safe distance, then came back in the dawn-light and cautiously approached the clearing. I wanted to see how my strategy had worked, for I had high hopes of it. No use murdering Dubois, I thought, when I could turn him to advantage alive.

And now for the curious part of it all—the desperately hopeless, singular twist of destiny, as though the unkind spirit of Siva, still dwelling in these old Khmer temples, were prompting fate.

Reaching the clearing, slipping down among the trees, I discovered with a thrill of joy that my ruse had actually worked. The porters were breakfasting, the Achin hunters were getting ready the loads. Before the door of the House of the Tevadas, Dubois and the red-headed Fraser were at work, and conferring as they worked.

I slipped down closer to them, safe enough in the still growing light of dawn, for here among the trees everything was obscure yet. Whether they believed my boast of having natives was doubtful. My mention of their having looted Kephard's station, and the government pursuit, had been enough to throw a strong scare into them, however. It predisposed them to believe what I had said about the gold.

They were working on the gold now, sacking it for transport. What they had raked out of the inner room and what they had picked up from Dak's peltings

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made a sizable bit of loot. All coins, all big round gold mohurs, that must have delighted their evil hearts.

"Aye, he probably told the truth," said Fraser, stacking up the last heap of coins. "If there'd been any more of the stuff we'd have found it here. They didn't have time to carry off much of anything. Still, there must be more of it in these ruins, somewhere!"

Dubois nodded and cast a glance around at the horizon of treetops.

"Yes; if we were only sure, if we knew where to look. That wild girl would know, of a certainty. However, if we have all they know about, why linger further?"

"Right," said Fraser. He lifted his hard, evil face, alight with greed. "But did that accursed monkey come from here with the coins, Dubois?"

To my relief, the big Frenchman dismissed the question with a shrug. Fraser had been on the verge of the secret, there.

I was on the point of withdrawing when something happened. From the stones directly before the two men came a tinkling thud. Fraser, with an exclamation of incredulous astonishment, leaned forward and picked up a golden bracelet that had fallen there.

A furious, strident chattering burst forth. They looked up, staring. So did I, and my heart sank. I cursed that little creature viciously. For there, perched on the ruined pediment above, capering, balancing, was the monkey, Dak. And in one arm he clutched a great mass of golden ornaments, bracelets, arm-rings!

Next instant, with one wild exclamation, Dubois leaped to his feet and reached for his rifle. Fraser, equally quick, caught hold of his arm and halted him, speaking under his breath. An angry chatter broke from Dak, who released all his golden wealth at the two men. All about them in a shower fell the heavy ornaments—but suddenly, regardless, they turned and plunged into the doorway and were gone from sight.

The voice of Dubois rose in wild shouted orders, probably from the side windows. The natives leaped into action. The Achin hunters darted for their rifles, began to work from the clearing, running for the trees. At this, I too turned and got out of sight and sound. The game was lost.

"WHAT a damnable break of luck!" I muttered angrily as I legged it through the jungle. I was furious—and helpless. "That confounded monkey has been dipping into some old Khmer treasure house, and now they know it. More coins would not have been so bad—but he had to come along with jewelry, at this crisis!"

Yes, Dubois knew now that I had lied, and soon he would know that I had run a bluff on him. With full daylight, those hunters would pick up my tracks there in the soft ground under the trees. They would discover that I had been quite alone. Well, I had passed up my chance to put a bullet into Dubois—yet the gamble had been well worth while. So near to winning—and to lose by such a chance!

I came to the loads. Now, with daylight, I could examine the two packs, and did so. To my untold joy, the first one proved to contain tinned preserves and other sweets; the second held tinned meats of all kinds. I hurriedly made one pack from portions of both, to take with me. The remainder I rolled up and carefully hid away against the future, taking detailed observations on how to find the spot again.

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Then, with my load, I started out for home. Home, naturally, being where Lana was.

I found her up and around, but able to move only with great pain in her hurt thigh, so I put a stop to it. My load of loot caused her frantic delight; she had never tasted preserved fruit or meat, naturally, and it was new and absorbing. If I had let her do it, she would have opened every tin in the pack to sample everything.

As for me, I was despondent, and worn out physically. The previous day had exhausted my new-found strength more than I was aware. This morning's expedition had about finished me. For the moment, I had no heart to undertake a regular campaign against Dubois, though it was the obvious thing to do. I just flopped down and went in for recuperation and lazy living, having food enough and to spare. I did not tell Lana of the morning's disappointment—what was the use?

All this day and the next I worked around the place, making our room habitable and getting acquainted with the vicinity. Whether our present home had been the elephant stables or not, it had terraces outside, now grown over, of the most amazing description. They were entirely bordered by Nagas, which were supposed to have been the founders of the Khmer race. These huge serpents of stone ran along as balustrades, often for hundreds of yards at a time, every inch of the stone body intricately carved like the scales of a serpent; every now and again would rise the seven heads of a snake, cobra-like, each head composed of tiny snakes. Not even back at the snake shrine had I seen anything like these Nagas, for sheer artistic merit and grace. Whole generations of sculptors must have worked them out.

By the end of the second day, Lana was hobbling about, although stiffly. All her old grace of flowing motion was gone. The wound was clean, however, and as soon as her muscles knit she would be herself again.

On the third morning I departed before daylight, as before. Now I would settle my own doubts and fears regarding Dubois; also, I meant to fetch in the supplies I had hidden. I was entirely recovered in strength, and twice the man I had been a week previously when we came to this jungled city.

I was aware of the change myself. I had been in need of this danger, this lesson in self-reliance, this constant turmoil with death at every side. The old life, the old Frank Adams, seemed years away in the past.

When I reached the vicinity of the House of the Tevadas I proceeded cautiously enough, for I had made a later start than before, and the full day was breaking. It was a lucky thing that I did go warily, too, because I was walking squarely into a trap. Nothing but the blood-lust of that red-headed devil Fraser spoiled their scheme.

THERE was no breath of wind, yet I saw tree-branches off to my left suddenly move. They had built a machan, or tiger-platform, there, and Fraser was in the act of firing when I caught the movement. Involuntarily I leaped to one side, and the leap saved my life, for Fraser's rifle crashed as I jumped.

A yell went up—a chorus of yells. A rifle exploded, this time behind me. Those Achin hunters were scattered all through the jungle; I had been expected. I did not pause to fire back, but took to my heels. Another and another shot rang out. One bullet sang past my head, but none touched me.

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Then they were after me, like dogs after a deer. At least, my question was answered—Dubois had remained to run down the gold.

By this time I had had enough jungle experience to pick the best trail in an emergency, and I did not lose my head. I realized that, having failed to down me at the first fire, they would take for granted that by following me they would be led to where Lana was—and it was she they wanted above all else, thinking she knew the secret of the gold.

So, though I might have doubled back on my course, I deliberately swept off at right angles to it. Not that those hunters had any intention of sparing my life. Once they had left the two whites far behind, they were out to get me. And they came near doing it.

For half an hour I ran at top speed—you try it some time and see where it leaves you. Sprinting across open glades, slowing up among thickets, dodging off under the twilight of the great jungle trees; when at last I halted, with my lungs afire, I hoped desperately that they had lost my trail. I had to know, so I settled down between the roots of a mammoth tree and waited.

I had heard no pursuit, no shots. Yet, five minutes later, one of those hunters came into sight, following my trail. He darted forward, rifle over his arm, and when he was within a hundred feet of me I pressed the trigger.

To the shot, he whirled around and sprawled down.

I was up and off on the instant, and behind me heard a shrill, high yell, as others came up and found him.

All this while I had carefully avoided the enormous masses of buildings that loomed up here and there among the trees. Around these, the far-spread ruins and fallen masonry were thickly overgrown, and would only serve to delay me. But now, conscious that I could not get away from these brown devils by speed alone, I turned toward the nearest ruin in sight and worked my way straight for it. My intention was twofold.

Where I was, I had not the least idea. Seeing a stone causeway ahead, I gained it and went on toward the green-clad mass of rock, thus losing my trail to the hunters—for I went on with care. Being well aware that nearly all of these ancient buildings could be climbed, either on the outside or within, it seemed to me that if I could lie hidden here and shake off my pursuers, I might get orientated from the summit of this ruin. For I was certainly lost. And to be lost in this ancient city of giants was no joke whatever.

At the moment, however, I was interested only in escape. Lana, I knew, would get on all right. She was too crippled to come seeking me, which was a good thing. As I drew closer to the ruin ahead, I perceived that it was an enormous structure, apparently not greatly damaged, but entirely masked from sight by the multitude of vines, small trees and brush which had overgrown it. Their roots, indeed, had served not only to dislodge the stones, but also to hold them in place, for all these buildings were made of stone laid without mortar.

So, a tiny atom of humanity against this incredible mass of carved and fretted masonry, I plunged at it and was soon lost to sight of any below.

MY chief aim was to get upward, unseen, while I could. In this, by luck, I succeeded, for I struck a portion of the building where the carved work and statues and gal-

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leries had slid down in a huge talus slope—apparently the one side of the structure that had suffered during the centuries.

I went up that slope like a monkey, dodging among the trees and vines, forcing a way where there was none. Finally I hauled myself on a shattered gallery, a third of the way up, and flung myself down to rest and watch. From here, at least, I had a view of the back trail and the jungle for a little way.

My ruse had succeeded; no doubt the death of their comrade had caused the other hunters to follow the trail more slowly and carefully.

Presently they came into sight, four of them scattered out, appearing singly. They had lost the trail; they came together, two others joined them, and they conferred. Then they scattered, divided, went working around the ruin and were lost to sight. I knew all that I needed, and with a sigh of relief, let myself relax. Rolling over, I laid aside the rifle, turned on my back, and rested.

The sun by this time, was high in the heavens.

As I knew well, my cue was to stay quiet for a while, and I did so, gratefully. No matter where I was, the enemy were off the trail of Lana, which was the main thing. Hunger and thirst, for the moment, were lesser evils.

After an hour or so I rose, picked up my rifle, and set about climbing the rest of the way up. This proved to be a simple if rather tedious matter for the gallery in which I found myself wound upward by concentric circles toward the crest of the building. Within half an hour a glorious view burst upon me as I gained a position above the tree-level. It came suddenly, unexpectedly, and held me spellbound.

I was looking off over the trees, over the jungle. Here and there above that leafy green sea, to north and east and south, rose the tips of temples or palaces of the Khmer kings. They were only recognizable as upward jutting bits of jungle, for all were overgrown. Farther than I could see they rose, like recurrent waves of green against the horizon. The enormous extent of this lost city was borne in upon me as never before.

Nowhere, however, could I see anything that I recognized. The buildings themselves were encased solidly in foliage and brush, even to the tips. I calculated that the House of the Elephants must lie off to the northeast of where I now stood. This at least would be the right direction in which to regain Lana. For a moment I searched the blue, cloudless sky in vain hope of seeing or hearing a distant airplane there. Then I turned to the amazing western view that faced me.

Here, after a quarter-mile, the jungle ended abruptly. Ended, at least, for a long distance, in an immense open space of blazing naked rock. Here, where presumably had once been a rocky eminence, was now a shallow depth studded with pools of stagnant water and sparse clumps of brush. The quarry, in other words, whence had been taken all the inconceivable amount of stone for the building of this ancient city.

This bare expanse extended for perhaps half a mile. Straight across it, unbroken, uncovered by trees, ran a wide, level causeway. And at the end of this causeway, where the jungle once more drew down to engulf its prey, was a glorious and almost perfect building, with the trees just closing about it. Another tower with faces!

No archway, this, but a rounded, bulging structure shaped something

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like a lotus bud. The top, at least the side toward me, held an enormous smiling face that leered straight at me above the trees; a face unbroken, majestic, cruelly calm in its smile. Seen at such a distance, this gigantic stone face held all its original expression. The tip of the building rose above it like a Khmer crown, and even held touches of gilding or gold leaf that flamed in the sunlight.

ABRUPTLY, something lifted beside this building—a puff of smoke that rose high in the air and then vanished. After it came a second one. Then I descried a faint thread of smoke ascending against the distant trees. Some one was there—some one was signaling! And certainly not to Dubois. Could it be possible that Cohen had crashed? No; he would not be signaling, unless in mere blind hope. More likely, natives were camped there. Perhaps the same natives whom I had heard Dubois and Fraser discussing; perhaps some of the same tribe whom I had met with Cohen, on the way here. Well, at least they were more human than Dubois.

I searched the jungle sea for any sign of the Achin hunters, and found none. That they had reached that great tower with the face and were signaling was most unlikely. However, it was possible. I would have to step cautiously, neglect nothing. Heading northeast would be my best bet to find Lana again.

So I set about the descent from the building, no light matter.

I had made out one important point—that the great stone road led straight from this building where I was to the tower of Siva. For so that great bulging structure with the majestic face above it was named, as I later discovered. As it chanced, I reached the ground at the western side of the building, where that road began. I had no intention of following it; indeed, I meant to strike off immediately and make my way back to Lana.

However, if I thought those wily Achin hunters were content to lose their quarry and let him stay lost, I was sadly mistaken.

All around this base of the building was a terrific tangle of vines and jungle growth. With the greatest caution, I wormed my way out of it and headed for an opening that promised to lead in the proper direction. As far as I could tell, the vicinity was absolutely empty of any danger to me. I started across the opening, where elephant-grass grew waist high and extremely thick.

Off to my left, at the edge of the trees, a rifle cracked. No warning. With the shot, I knew that I was hit. I felt no pain, but something jerked at me. I lost balance and fell forward on hands and knees.

A shrill yell of savage exultation went up.

Stupefied, dazed, I looked down at myself. Blood! No. But the thick leather belt about my waist, a bandolier that held my extra cartridges, was ripped and torn. The bullet had actually gone through the heavy leather, tearing a couple of cartridges loose and burning my skin—and nothing worse.

Still on my knees, I looked up. From the trees, one of the native hunters was coming out, rifle ready, his cruel, slanted eyes scanning the grass where I lay. Grimly cautious, I brought up my rifle, cocked it. Slight as was the sound, he took warning and was in the very act of dropping into the grass when I fired. He dropped, indeed, but with a bullet through his head.

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Almost instantly a rifle cracked among the trees to my right and well ahead. The bullet whistled close. This told me that I was cut off in that direction. A shrill yell, and another that replied to it, both came from my right. At least two of the devils in that direction, then.

Already I was crawling back from the opening. Upon gaining the mask of trees and brush, I came erect and made a dash for the stone causeway. A bullet whistled overhead, but neither of the two hunters was close enough to do any accurate shooting.

Presently I gained the stone road, and made my way along it, scrambling through the brush and trees that covered it here in the jungle. At least, I had shelter thus, and if I could make no great speed, neither could those who followed me. I had one recourse now, to head for the tower of Siva out across the open. Thought of the smoke-signal spurred me on. If natives were there, well and good.

With them, I would at least have a chance for life, and I had none with these devils who hunted me. Besides, the open quarry gave me a chance to fight if I wanted it, and the burning thirst that consumed me by this time was another factor. No matter who was encamped near that tower, water must be there.

The trees thinned out ahead. I was coming now to the open causeway that ran across the presumed stone quarry. How far behind me were the two hunters I could not tell; but already I had decided to chance everything and leg it for that Tower of Siva. With luck I could make it. Men at the run or pausing momentarily to fire cannot do good shooting.

Abruptly I was clear of the last tangle—before me were the great stone blocks, open, unhindered. Broken up, of course; one had to use care, for there were great gaps in the pavement. But I broke into a sprint, and went over those hot stones like a quarter-miler, everything I had going to make time.

A rifle cracked, and again; both shots missed. I plunged on, now leaping a gap, now going into a burst of speed. I was nearing the end of the quarry. Ahead of me rose the tower with the huge smiling face, as though the ancient god was amused by the antics of these mites of men.

Something moved ahead — figures. Three men, four, who were running forward. Facing into the sun as I was, I could see little or nothing about them or who they were. Then, as I was going full speed, sudden disaster opened out ahead. A great gap in the pavement, a hole—no avoiding it! It was deep and wide, twenty feet or more across.

With one desperate plunge, I tried frantically to take it with a flying leap. I touched the opposite side, clawed at it—then the earth and stones gave way under me. Amid a rush of débris, I slid down head over heels, cracked my skull against a stone, and lay momentarily dazed.

My run was ended.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD.

I WAS roused by the bang of a gun —not the crack of a rifle by any means. It came from almost overhead.

Rallying my dizzy senses, I clawed about, retrieved my rifle, and sat up. Some one was yelling; it was a wild, fierce yell. Then a rifle cracked out, and again. Another yell. I came erect,

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plunged at the slope of rubble at one side, and a moment later gained the edge of the chasm, bleeding, bruised, but with no great damage done.

Shots rang in my ears. Turning, I thrilled to a sight I shall never forget. The four men coming from the building were natives, wild bronzed men yelling like fiends. And the two Achin hunters who pursued me, not fifty feet away, were firing at them with cool deliberation. Those four were coming at them, and no mistake.

One of the four pitched over like a rabbit hit in mid-leap. The other three fired as they ran. One of the Achinese doubled up and went down. The other continued to fire; he had halted now, and shot like a veteran. One of the three fell. The second went down. The third, bounding on alone, suddenly halted and yelled something, flourishing his rifle. Without reply, the Achin hunter aimed and fired, deliberately. The last of the four bronze men pitched over on his face.

With that, I opened up. My first shot missed. Suddenly remembering me, not seeing me, the Achin hunter turned and ran. My second shot reached him. He fell, left his rifle, and ran like a deer. I sent two more bullets after him. Both missed.

The hunter stumbled twice, fell once, but kept going, holding one hand to his side. The last I saw of him he was diving into the jungle, weaponless and wounded. I considered going after him and making a clean sweep of it—but to hunt a wounded tiger in a bamboo clump was rank folly. And I was in no shape for more running.

I was clear of Dubois's gang at last, and I had best stay clear.

Reloading, I looked around. No more men were coming from the tower. These four natives must have been alone there. I went up to them. The expanding bullets had torn the life out of three at once. The last was dying—he quivered and groaned something. The words startled me. "*Ow ooglah!*" The same phrase that yellow priest and the other natives had used! Were these four men of the same tribe?

There was none to tell. The man died almost as he spoke.

I went back to where the dead Achin hunter lay. A bullet had taken him under the chin and ended him quickly. His cartridges were the same as my own; I took them all and was glad of the supply. He had nothing else I wanted except some matches—and a razor. I pulled it out, stared at it, and with a laugh thrust it into my pocket.

Hesitation took me, as I stared at the great tower so close at hand, the leering face of Siva seeming to hang against the sky. The afternoon was very early; I had plenty of time, need not worry about pursuit. Those natives must have food and water, a camp. I set off for the tower.

As I neared it I realized that the stone road had ended. Rather, had been submerged under sand and dust and—bones. Then, looking down, I started violently. Bones indeed! Here were bones, skulls, all around me; and they were human remains. Stretching over the whole expanse of ground, right up to the tower, the bones of men innumerable, of human beings past count or imagination.

I remembered what Lana had said regarding the Tower of the Dead, coupling it with the idea of natives, of fear, of acute peril. And that poor devil of a native had died uttering what seemed to be her name among his people. Thus came to me a partial com-

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prehension of the truth — that Lana was worshiped by these native tribes, probably was feared by them—and they let no outsider in her domain. It was theirs, this ancient lost city of their ancestors, and to them she was its goddess.

Whence these bones came, whether this was the cemetery of the Khmers or merely the spot where some uncounted thousands and ten thousands of them made a last stand against the mysterious enemy that had swallowed up their whole civilization I never learned.

PASSING on, I came to the camp of the four native warriors. My prime interest now was in food and drink, and I found plenty of both. There were a couple of huts beyond the tower, where either these four, or, as seemed more likely, relays of such guards had been posted for a long time. Near by was a spring, where I bathed and drank, after a hearty meal of the corn and rice and flesh I found awaiting me, not to mention fruits and plantains.

The House of the Dead! It was a queer sort of building. Except for one large entrance, quite blocked up by rubble and fallen masonry, and one small triangular doorway that gaped ominously at me, this tower had no opening. No other doors, no windows, no galleries. It had plenty of carved work and bas reliefs, but I was not interested in them.

I walked up to the little triangular entrance, which was only seven feet high. On either side of this was a huge slab of stone, the two meeting at the apex. A moment of hesitation and then I entered.

At once, finding myself emerging from a short passage into a huge chamber, I knew there was something wrong. My nostrils told me so. I could scent a strong fetid odor, but could not imagine what it was or meant. Yet I halted, instinctively. An odd sense of peril came over me—a queer, indefinable terror that gripped at my very soul.

"Nonsense," I muttered. "A few skulls, Lana's superstitious awe of this place, have got under your skin. Be yourself. If that gold comes from here, you want to know it. And if that girl and the monkey can walk in here, so can you."

None the less, the feeling persisted. I could not rid myself of uneasiness.

Something struck against my foot as I moved, and I looked down. Here was another skull, a white and gleaming one that looked fresh; but it was smashed as by some terrific blow. I was getting used to the dim light here, and looked around.

I was in a central, circular chamber, into which light filtered by cracks in the roof above. I remember how the sunbeams struck down, how dust danced and shimmered across them. Details grew upon me. Several doorways were visible, their ancient wooden doors still in place, but all burst open and sagging.

Weapons! All about me they were, on the walls, ranged in neat order between the doors, and such weapons as I had never seen. Much of the old woodwork had fallen into dust, so that arrows, for example, lay piled amid fragments of their quivers. Spears, shields, all kinds of swords and daggers; queer, conical helmets—everything imaginable was here, yet none of it was ordinary. Everywhere was the sheen of gold.

From one of the burst doors, too, came a livelier golden sheen—coins,

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that had been slithered across the floor in a mass. No doubt the monkey, Dak, had done this. At thought of what might be back of these doors, my heart beat faster. The treasure house of the Khmer kings—aye, and guarded by the dead! Still feared by the living; left open to any who might come, those bronze warriors of the jungle merely guarded the place and dared not enter it.

Why? The one word stirred in me. Mere tradition would not keep those natives out of this place. Again I felt the sense of danger, of peril, of some frightful unseen death that hovered in this place. And again I laughed at it.

I should have known better. Natives might hold the place sacred and shun it, but Lana was no native. And she was in deathly fear of this building.

NONE the less, I looked about me carefully. Snakes, perhaps? No; not a thing in sight, nothing moving except the dancing motes of dust in the sunbeams. Utter silence reigned here. I looked up at the high vaulted roof. The cracks showed clearly against the sky, many of them huge fissures that crept among the stones. One good earthquake shock, I thought, would fetch this whole structure down in a heap of ruins.

I glanced around the walls. Nothing there that I wanted; still, I must find something here, something worth taking back to Lana in token that I had been here. Vanity stirred in me, and arrogant pride. Let her know that I had conquered this House of Death, which caused her such fear.

So thinking, I turned to one of the doorways. These were large, very large and high, and something curious about the hanging door drew my attention. It was made of ebony poles pegged together—its weight must have been enormous — and, like most Oriental doors, was set in sockets, top and bottom, instead of on side hinges.

But this door had literally been torn from its place, as though by some terrific force. It was scored, deep into the wood, as though by adzes, although no adze except the finest steel would bite into this iron-like wood. I noticed something else, now—a trickle of water, probably from some hidden spring, that seeped across one corner of the circular chamber.

All these things should have warned me—but how was I to guess?

The thought of treasure quickened my pulse—the treasure of kings! Not that it would do me any good; but I was not thinking in dollars and cents. The fever of discovery pushed me hard. I was wildly excited about it all, but it was no mere lust for wealth such as drove Dubois and his men.

I stepped into the doorway before me and looked in at the chamber there.

All about this circular room were others into which the huge doors opened. Each was a segment of a circle. At first, as I looked in, a keen disappointment rose within me, for I saw nothing that looked like treasure—no gold, no coins, nothing. A roof-crack that went along the whole outer wall of the building gave light enough. Before me rose only heaps of dust.

Then it occurred to me that, through the centuries, anything stored in this room must indeed be thick with dust. Besides, the seepage of water in the central chamber explained the rot that must have seized upon any ordinary wood or leather.

At this instant something like a wheezy, shuddering moan vibrated through me, through the air around me. My nerves jumped. I darted back

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to the doorway and looked into the central chamber. Nothing there. Merely the wind striking through the ancient pinnacles of carved stone up above. Perhaps, I reflected, by some crafty skill the ancient builders had made the huge faces of Siva in such a way that the wind would whistle and moan through those great stone lips. Yes, that would explain everything.

With a laugh, I turned back into the room of dust, and struck my rifle-butt at one of the piles.

Dust—a flood of it rising in the air. I stepped away hastily. Something solid under the dust, at any rate. I struck again, then turned to a drum-like heap on my left, and gave it the butt. More dust, powdery, choking; but the rifle-butt had smashed through something. Out upon the floor, running even to my feet and around them, poured a shimmering, flashing tide of glittering articles — jewelry of all kinds, incredible massy gold, carved and set with stones. Then a second, heavier flood of queerly carved bits of stone.

Jade. Jade of all kinds, white and yellow and black, the treasure of the ancient yellow races! No green jade, for in the ancient times it was unknown. I stared down at it, grunted my distaste, and turned to the tide of gold and gems.

THIS was more like it. The first thing I picked out of the pile was a gorgeous collar of enormous crimson stones, flashing and glinting, held together with bits of graven gold —a perfect thing, glorious beyond description. The stones, which were cut, were like frozen blood. Suddenly it was borne upon me that they were. With a gasp, I eyed them afresh, incredulously.

Rubies, of course! Rubies from the ancient mines in the hills, where for uncounted generations the world had come for ruby and sapphires, where the stones were mined even now by syndicates. Rubies from Burmah, of course.

But more wonderful than any rubies I had ever beheld.

Here was the gift supreme, something which I could take back to Lana and which would be worthy of her. How to carry it? About my neck, of course. What pockets I had left were stuffed with cartridges—more valuable to us just now than any rubies.

With a laugh I slipped the heavy collar over my head, then turned to examine the pile once more. Here I had come upon treasure that dwarfed the mere value of the gold coins and bracelets that Dak had looted from the place. When I looked about the room and thought of what must lie beneath all these piles of dust, I was staggered. It passed the imagination to conceive what wealth must lie stored in this House of Death.

I stooped and turned over the running mass of stuff with my fingers. The movement served to bring down another flood from the rotted and smashed container. Some of these boxes and chests, no doubt, like the first I struck, must be teakwood which had resisted time and decay.

Rings, bracelets, necklaces of all kinds, sifted through my hands. All manner of jewels were here, but few enough jewels as we know them—cut stones like those in the collar were rare.

Then I struck upon something that would not be resisted. It was a massive arm-band of soft, raw gold, exquisitely worked with all manner of figures, and set with a dozen shimmering diamonds—huge stones of ancient cut that were shot with fire beneath the

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sunbeams. I stood for a space, staring at it, examining it curiously. Thrusting it over my left arm, I found it was altogether too small for me—it would only fit over my wrist.

"Well, I can take it along and try it on Lana," I thought, laughing softly. Then I lifted my head, startled.

Again I was conscious of that strange fetid odor, but now in so strong a gust that it sickened me. It was the odor of death, in very truth. Sudden alarm and terror rushed upon me. I stood there, listening, staring, and caught up my rifle with a quick gesture.

Panic crept upon me—fear of the unseen. Oddly enough, I could see nothing amiss, nor could I hear anything; and yet I was conscious of movement. I could actually feel something moving there in the circular chamber!

Then I heard it, and felt prickles run over my flesh. What I heard was breathing—a long, tremendous breathing! A clicking rasp of something striking the stone; then the stones under my feet shook slightly. This, queerly enough, wakened more terror in me than anything else; only an enormous weight could cause these stones to move.

I looked at the half-open door, licked my lips, fought down my childish panic. Cocking my rifle, I went into the doorway and looked around the huge, high chamber. It was darker in there.

At first I saw nothing. I was about to start for the entrance, when all of a sudden I was paralyzed.

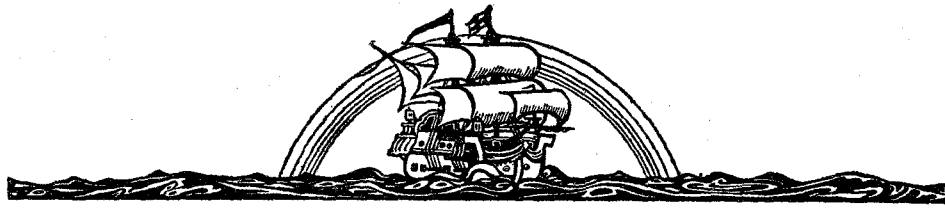
Actually paralyzed, unable to move a muscle. For now—now, merciful heavens! I saw the thing in that other room, awaiting me.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

Colombia's Rope Railway

IN order to transport coffee from a valley in the Central Andes to a railroad leading to the coast, a rope railway has been built in Colombia which is forty-five and three-quarter miles long—only two miles longer than direct crow-flight. Suspended from cables the cars reach a height of 12,000 feet through wild, rocky country, thick vegetation, fog, cold, rain and constant wind. At one point the line climbs one mile in ten. The line is divided into fifteen sections and the cable kept moving by eight driving plants. Occasionally passengers cross the mountains on a saddle hung from the cables. Once a circus was sent in to Manizales over the line, with fifteen tons of animals.

J. W. Holden.



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Your Horoscope

Those who have received horoscope readings from Miss Carter will find a number of sections explained below. Readings including all of your own planetary positions will appear weekly in the next few issues of ARGOSY.

Sections previously published, which you may have missed, will be repeated.

Section 215. Mercury.

THIS planetary position tends to make the individual born under it changeable and versatile. You would have been given an increased tendency to scatter your energies. The position, in itself, is not strong enough to dominate your chart, and if other testimony points to conservatism its influence will not be greatly apparent. Frequently, however, those who come into the world under this vibration have some tendency to be unreliable, their variable mental attitude making it difficult to predict their reaction to any situation. The position should have given you a degree of fondness for literature and a measure of studiousness. It would also have increased the brilliance of your mentality. It is quite likely that the tendency to occupy yourself with several things at the same time is present in your make-up; this should be restrained as much as possible. Unless born under very conservative birth signs, you may find it hard to tie yourself down to a routine task.

Section 274. Uranus.

FROM an astrological standpoint this is very significant. The planet tends toward the unconventional and rebellious, to a considerable extent. That influence is heightened by its position in this sign. Unless there are strong counteracting influences in your chart, you are very much inclined to be impatient of restraint and resentful of conventions. Astrologers of olden times felt it was not a favorable position for harmonious marriage, and might cause fluctuation in fortune, particularly in earlier years of life. According to astrological rules it is a very good position for a public career, although hindrances and social annoyances might come about as a result of it. It is not unusual for those who were born under this influence to have some tendency to be fickle. The probabilities are that you make very strong friends and equally strong enemies. One who is affected by this vibration should avoid an appearance of unconventionality to as great an extent as possible.

Section 228. Venus.

AN astrologer of some ancient civilization would have called this an indication that you were quite likely to benefit through marriage and, more than is usual, through your parents. Also that it suggests that you could benefit financially through some occupation connected with water more readily than in something far removed from that element. According to astrological rules, however, it is an influence which sometimes delays marriage and frequently those who come under its influence experience obstacles in that connection which come about through difference in age or position. The position is one which points to a considerable degree of emotionalism and you are quite sentimental unless other testimony in your chart is of a strongly contrary nature. Of course a cold and wholly intellectual birth sign would lessen the effect of this influence to a considerable degree.

Section 273. Uranus.

AN astrologer of ancient times, were it possible for you to consult one, would have advised you to proceed with caution in any matter involving real estate. The probabilities are that you are very responsive to psychic vibrations. Possibly you do not realize the cause, but the result of this condition would be to make you suddenly depressed or equally elated, without apparent cause. It will be advisable for you to consider your surroundings when you are depressed without reason. Unwholesome atmosphere, sordid environment or weather conditions would be quite injurious in their effect upon you. You will probably always be in a much better frame of mind when you are surrounded by pleasant people and conditions.

Section 219. Mercury.

PEOPLE born under this sign tend to make a marriage of the mind rather than of the heart. You are probably much more inclined toward intellectual activity than is usual. Unless other testimony in your chart is of an opposite nature, you prefer to work in collaboration or partnership with others, rather than to "play a lone hand." It has always been considered a favorable position for harmonious family relations, and while it would not, alone, assure such a state, it would certainly aid greatly in that connection. Both the sign and planet are considered intellectual in their influence, bestowing balanced judgment and a scientific mental attitude. You would probably have been given some natural ability to judge the value of merchandise, and those who receive the benefit of these vibrations to the fullest extent become splendid merchants.

Section 272. Saturn.

THE planetary position which this section considers is one that astrologers do not consider wholly fortunate in its influence over those affected. Ancient astrologers foresaw danger in confiding too fully in those with whom one was associated. The position points to the possibility of difficulty as a result of secret enemies and through trouble with inferiors. In the majority of cases, those born under this influence are their own worst enemies. It is an odd influence because, while it seems to bring about misfortune at times, those misfortunes are almost invariably the direct result of a mental attitude held by those affected by the position. You should take particular pains to cultivate a cheerful, optimistic mental attitude. The influence of this vibration would not be felt to any great extent if you were born under a birth sign which imparts strongly optimistic reactions, but unless that was the case you should watch for and guard against pessimism.

Section 224. Mercury.

THOSE born under this influence are apt to act from instinct rather than as a result of careful reasoning. It imparts tendencies which are the exact opposite of scientific. If you were born under other influences which gave you a scientific mental attitude, much of that quality may remain, but it was lessened by this vibration. You are magnanimous and just to a far greater extent than you would have been without this ray, and you are more even tempered than you would have been. It is a very fortunate position for success in imaginative writing, singing or public speaking. The position would not have had anything to do with the vocal organs directly, however, and in that connection would not aid one to become a singer, yet it is considered by astrologers to bestow other qualities which would greatly aid. It is a testimony pointing to trouble with education and possibly with brothers and sisters. You were given romantic sympathies by this position. Many people affected are incurably romantic at heart.

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STRANGER *than* FICTION

By JOHN S. STUART

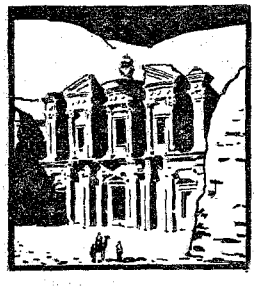
A LITTLE DINNER PARTY

THE greatest banquet in history took place on August 18, 1889, when the 40,000 mayors of France dined in the Palais d'Industrie in Paris. They were served in three relays of about 13,000 guests each. To prepare, the feast required 75 chief cooks; 13,000 waiters and scullions and cellarmen and helpers; 80,000 plates; 52,000 glasses; knives, forks and spoons in proportion; 40,000 rolls; and fish, meat and fowl by the ton. The banquet was a part of the centenary celebration of the events of 1789.

BEAUTY BEHIND BARS

EVEN the jails in Spain have surrendered to the craze for beauty competition which has followed the holding of the international beauty contest in Madrid. In Valencia a "Miss Prisoner" has been elected by companions in jail.

FROM THE TOP DOWN



PETRA, the mysterious mountain stronghold of the Nabataeans, was not built stone upon stone but was chiselled from living rock — downward from the top! Petra is in Northern Arabia, and first came into written history about 312 B.C. The stone is red sandstone, and the Temple of Ed-Deir, 147 feet wide by 138 feet high, is carved out of a hill of red sandstone. When the Nabataeans built an obelisk, they began at the top and cut away the surrounding rock until the obelisk stood alone.

CANINE CHOP SUEY

DOG is considered a great table delicacy by the Chinese. The canine most frequently used as an article of food is small, and of the grayhound type, with a head like a terrier. The skin is almost destitute of hair.

COALS OF FIRE ON THE HEAD

THE old superstition about walking under a ladder could be applied equally well to the early elevated trains. They burned soft coal, and if you walked beneath them you ran a chance of having a live ash drop on your best hat. Ladies in those days all wore veils, and upon emerging from an "El" train, their faces bore the design of the veil carefully outlined in soot!

DOES IT GLITTER?

DICK WHITTINGTON should have gone to Chinghai, one of China's most remote northwestern provinces, when he started searching for streets of gold. In Chinghai, gold is so plentiful that ore containing it is used for roadways. The gold is in disrepute in Chinghai, because the Mongol and Tibetan lamas try to discourage prospecting, claiming that mining operations displease the gods, who punish transgressors with dire visitations. The roof of Tarsze Temple is said to be roofed with enough gold to pay somebody's war debt—approximately $337,500,000! Wives, on the other hand, are scarce and precious, so that the natives practice polyandry.

This feature appears in ARGOSY every week

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Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

ARGOSY pays $1 for each letter printed. Send your letter to "Argonotes" Editor, ARGOSY, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

"INSULTED by superstition":

New York City, N. Y.

We are insulted! Yes, we, the readers of ARGOSY, are insulted! Astrology! ARGOSY will tell our fortunes? Will you? No, you won't.

Astrology is the most stupid falsehood ever perpetrated on the human race. It has not one iota of truth behind it and never had. This has been proven time and time again by scientists the world over. The sun and planets and stars have no effect on our lives any different than on the lives of anything else no matter when we were born. It is utterly ridiculous to attempt to foist astrology on people of today. And it should be a crime to encourage it, for that is encouraging superstition and charlatanism and is a deliberate statement of disbelief in everything science and advance of knowledge has done for mankind.

Miss Carter will give eight different planetary readings. Does she know that there are some 1,500 minor planets quite close enough to have an effect on lives if any effect were to be had? Not to mention comets and meteor streams. There is no astronomer alive of any respectability and authority, professional or amateur, who has anything but the greatest possible antipathy for astrology.

Take that advertisement out of your magazine and apologize before you start to lose all your good standing and a lot of your readers and possibly writers, too. Ask any of your science-fiction authors what they think of astrology, ask Ray Cummings, Ralph Milne Farley, Murray Leinster, R. F. Starzl or any others. Put it up to your readers, too. Go ahead, I dare you.

DONALD A. WOLLHEIM.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The astrology advertisements and horoscopes are being presented by Miss Carter, not as prediction or proven science, but as amusing, informative material for the entertainment of those interested in what this ancient cult has said and now says. She specifically denies any intention or ability to predict the future or solve the present—claims often made by charlatans and forbidden by law. ARGOSY is a magazine of entertainment, with variety and novelty as its keynote. As a fiction magazine, we take no sides editorially, make no arguments for or against any such highly debatable question as astrology. Our readers have every right to their own tastes, beliefs, and opinions—what's yours?

FOUR years passed . . .

Brighton Beach, N. Y.

During the first year of my marriage I ridiculed and nagged my husband for reading the ARGOSY—but, an easy-going man in everything else, he simply refused to discontinue reading it.

Now four years have passed—I volunteered to take the ten cents from my housekeeping money so that I could have the pleasure of reading the ARGOSY before my husband returns home.

I particularly enjoyed the "Purple Ball," and all your *Solomon* stories; your feature articles are an added joy. I am now reading Brent's "Valley of Missing Men" and find it extremely interesting.

MRS. MAX ROSENSON.

P. S. I wonder if the men readers would object if you devoted one or two pages to a "Women's Page."

PIPPIN:

West New York, N. J.

"The Red Pacer" was what I calls a pippin and what a pippin! Baby, if that guy, Baxter, doesn't get down to business again and write another story like that pretty soon, well, I wouldn't know what to do even if you have plenty of good authors. Yep, I knowed I had something to kick about, and that is your *Bill Jones* story. Boy, it was swell while it lasted, but, was I sore, you'd 'a' been sore, too, because that story was altogether too short.

There's another thing I gotta kick about, and that is: I never set me lamps on a story of submarine warfare during the World War. Here's an order!

EDW. BALLEY.

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NOT up to Kline's knees:

Compeer, Alberta, Can.

The character who most appeals to me is *Bob Zane,* although I like them all except *Bill* and *Jim* and *Mme. Storey.*

I think Baxter and Seltzer are by far your best Western authors and as far as writing goes E. R. Burroughs doesn't even come up to Kline's knees. H. C. F.

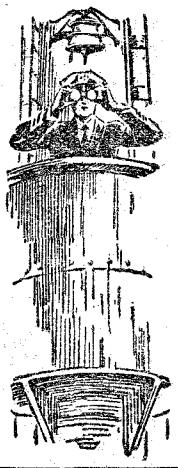
A HOUSEHOLD institution:

Curlew, Wash.

We started buying ARGOSY when we started housekeeping and we've never missed a copy yet.

We like the Western serials best, especially those written by Max Brand. "The White Indian" was a wonder. I don't care for the "impossible" stories, but my husband reads them all.

MR. AND MRS. EARL BROWN.



Looking Ahead!

The Octopus of Hongkong

Peter the Brazen, adventurer of the Orient, had heard of the lovely Eurasian girl, siren and demon, called the Octopus; but he had never clashed with her until—

A long novelette by

Loring Brent

Steel Must Go Through

Railroad builders fight an underworld attempt to levy tribute.

A novelette by

William Edward Hayes

The Bloodhounds! The Bloodhounds!

An Uncle Tom's Cabin show gets stranded in the sticks. A humorous short story by

Ellis Parker Butler

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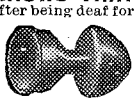

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32x3½	2.70	0.90	30x4.50	2.15	0.95
31x4	2.75	0.95	28x4.75	2.20	1.00
32x4	2.75	0.95	29x4.75	2.25	1.00
33x4	2.75	0.95	30x4.95	2.50	1.10
34x4	3.25	1.15	29x5.00	2.60	1.20
32x4½	2.95	1.25	30x5.00	2.60	1.20
33x4½	2.95	1.25	28x5.25	2.65	1.25
34x4½	2.95	1.25	30x5.25	2.75	1.25
30x5	3.25	1.45	31x5.25	2.95	1.25
33x5	3.25	1.55	28x5.50	2.95	1.30
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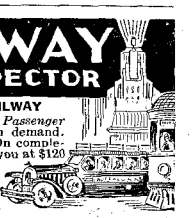

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